



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



# Oral History Interview

with

## Carol Siegel

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**Interviewer:** Francesco De Salvatore

**Narrator:** Carol Siegel

**Location of Interview:**  
Llyod House, 220 N Washington St, Alexandria, VA 22314

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**Transcriber:** Melat Ambaye

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### **Summary:**

*Carol Siegel was born in 1939 in New York City. She came to the Washington D.C. area in 1957 to attend American University, married and had 2 sons, moved to Arlington, and later moved to Alexandria in 1972. She discusses her childhood memories and her experiences in Alexandria. She also discusses her project documenting the Parker Gray neighborhood in 1985-86 as it was becoming gentrified. She received a grant from the Alexandria Commission on the arts, and spent a year interviewing and photographing many of the people and places in the community. She talks about the many connections and friendships she made during the year. She later went back to school and received a M.A. in Expressive Arts and worked with Seniors at the Adult Day Care Center for almost twenty-five years. She received "The Annie B. Rose award of lifetime achievement" in 2017.*

**Notes:**

*The first exhibition of the photographs entitled, "Spirit of the Neighborhood" was at The Athenaeum on Prince Street where city officials and the subjects of the photographs mingled. It was also the opening exhibition of the Black History Museum in 1989 and was shown again in 2012 called "The Spirit of the Neighborhood Revisited". Carol lived in the neighborhood of Ballentrae on Key Drive.*

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<b>General</b>	Childhood; Art; Therapy; Aging; Neighborhood; Spouse; Children; Friendships; Mentors; Home; Gentrification;
<b>People</b>	Eudora Lyles; Annie Rose; Roger Anderson; Phillip Bell
<b>Places</b>	New York City, New York; Alexandria, Virginia; Key Drive; Parker-Gray neighborhood; Hopkins House; American University; Quaker Lane; Northern Virginia Community College; Duke Street; Brad Lee Shopping Center;

**Carol Siegel** [00:00:00] Carol Sigel. Age 84. Today is May 11th, 2023, and at the Lloyd House.

**Francesco De Salvador** [00:00:16] Great. My name is Francesco de Salvador. It's May 11th. I'm here with Ms. Sigel at the Lloyd house. So, yeah, Hi there, Sigel. Thanks for coming in today and I want to start. You know, let's start at the beginning of your life, so, you know where are you from?

**Carol Siegel** [00:00:35] I'm from New York. I was born in New York City, but my family moved to Long Island when I was a little girl. So I really grew up in Nassau County, which is a suburb of New York.

**Francesco De Salvador** [00:00:52] Great. And so what are some of your earliest memories from childhood?

**Carol Siegel** [00:00:57] Well, I can remember way back when I was a baby. But I think one of the biggest things was the first TV we got when I was, I guess ten, we got a seven inch TV. Black and white, where mostly you saw the pattern, but there were a couple of shows, The Howdy Doody Show and the Small Fry club and all the kids came over after school and watched with me, which was a nice way for me to socialize because I was an only child and so that was one big thing. I actually remember, during the war, we had to collect cans and use the metal and people would smash cans. And I was looked at some cans, I guess, at one of the other houses. And I said to me, Oh, isn't that beautiful? And she always repeated that story because she said, you know, how could I look that and say it was beautiful? But I think that was the beginning of my artist eye, because I now still see things that are beautiful that other people wouldn't even notice. So that was a nice thing to remember.

**Francesco De Salvador** [00:02:28] Wow. Well, where do you think that came from?

**Carol Siegel** [00:02:33] You know, I have no idea, except my mother was an artist. My mother was actually a historian. She wrote quite a few books on the arts and crafts in New York and I don't know where that came from, but I am very grateful that I have it because it stayed with me my whole life.

**Francesco De Salvador** [00:02:55] Yeah.

**Carol Siegel** [00:02:56] Yeah.

**Francesco De Salvador** [00:02:57] The other instances growing up, you know, where that relate to your interest in the arts and creating art.

**Carol Siegel** [00:03:04] Well, I see it as art, but just the way I live my life and that I did a lot of physical activity. It was safe to run around and be in the woods. We had, you know, very carefree compared to now. And I would roller skate with our friends and bike and we played Tarzan and Jane in the woods, climb trees. I was considered at that time, I don't even know if this word still exists. I was a tomboy and I really wanted to play sports, but there was not a lot available for girls, so we had to do, hockey was about the only thing offered, which I didn't like so much so I think. And I did do some art and I was actually getting a little older in high school. I was the photography

editor of the school yearbook, so that was sort of a nice little remembrance that I did have that way back.

**Francesco De Salvador** [00:04:13] So is that when you started doing photography?

**Carol Siegel** [00:04:16] Yeah.

**Francesco De Salvador** [00:04:17] Yeah.

**Carol Siegel** [00:04:17] And before that, actually, in earlier memory, it was developing film with my dad. We would go around the basement and just have a roll of film and develop and see the negatives, not make prints. But I just thought that was just incredible to see that magic happen. So that was pretty early on. I don't know how old I was but.

**Francesco De Salvador** [00:04:43] That's great. That's great. And so let's fast forward then to Alexandria. So you moved to the city later in your life. So let's start with , you know, with how you got to Alexandria. How did you get to the city?

**Carol Siegel** [00:05:02] Get here?

**Francesco De Salvador** [00:05:03] And why? Why did you move to the city of Alexandria ?

**Carol Siegel** [00:05:06] Well, before I lived in Alexandria, I actually went to American University from New York. So that was my first time being in this area. And that was well, in 1957, I went to college and then graduated in 60, what, one or two? Well, after I went to college, I lived in D.C. because I married a man I met in college and we lived in D.C. and then after a while, moved to Arlington so I was in that area and then we moved away to Chicago and we came back. That's when I lived in Alexandria. That was 1972 and I think basically we found a house we liked and it was an Alexandria. Except I also remember thinking I wanted to live in a city that had that you could be part of the government. I felt like that would be better than Arlington is such a big county. I never felt like when I lived there that I could be that involved in the community as much as I wanted to be and thought Alexandria would be a better situation for that.

**Francesco De Salvador** [00:06:30] Right. So can you tell us, you know, through your eyes in the 1970s when when you, you know, officially moved here, like actually bought a home here and lived. Through your eyes, what did Alexandria look like? What was the city like through your eyes at that time?

**Carol Siegel** [00:06:48] Well, what I remember mostly was in the air. I lived off Quaker Lane, and Quaker Lane was just a two lane kind of country road looking and on the corner of my block, there was a farm. I don't know. It was a working farm, but there was no house and just a great big field and close to Old Town, there was not much here. We used to visit when I lived in the district and that was way back. It was just like a couple of things, a couple of stores, and landmark had just opened. So that was a big deal to have a big open air mall. And I think I don't know when there was an airport on King Street, where Skyline is now, but I think that was before I moved to Alexandria. But I did remember that from living in the district and visiting. Coming to Alexandria was like

coming to the country when we took a ride. Okay, let's go to the country and we go to Alexandria. So and my street, which I lived on, was a through street.

**Francesco De Salvador** [00:08:07] Or Braddock Street.

**Carol Siegel** [00:08:09] Key drive. It was a through street. And the kids would fly down and go because it would cut around to T.C. Williams, that was the name of the school, then up until this year, and there were no sidewalks and I had two little children. So that was my first, kind of feeling of advocacy was to get that street closed off to through traffic, which I accomplished. I got the neighbors got a petition, and that felt like a really big deal for me to do that had to test, you know, go to city council and this and that. So that started me getting involved with the community. Plus the PTA, I was involved with that, my ex-husband was president of the PTA for a while. And to that was kind of when I started feeling part of this community, getting involved and making a difference. That was I made a difference.

**Francesco De Salvador** [00:09:25] Yeah, it sounds like it. Yeah. So what did you what was what did you and your neighbors call the area you lived in at that time? Well, what did you call the neighborhood at that time? What was the name of it?

**Carol Siegel** [00:09:39] Oh, it was called Ballin Troy. The name of the neighborhood? I don't know which streets were there. Just.

**Carol Siegel** [00:09:49] A few streets there.

**Francesco De Salvador** [00:09:50] And so can you describe for those who obviously wouldn't be able to see it now, what did that neighborhood look like in the 1980s? You're very to kind of describe a little bit details a little bit more. You walk us through the street a little bit. What did it look like? Well, what was the feel of the neighborhood?

**Carol Siegel** [00:10:09] Well, you mean as far as the houses are the people.

**Francesco De Salvador** [00:10:12] The houses, the lots any details.

**Carol Siegel** [00:10:17] It was very well. Pretty big houses. And there was a creek kind of running through the property which would flood sometimes. And there were quite a few Jewish people on the block on my block. And I'm Jewish. So that was sort of interesting. And the neighbors were they did a lot of socializing just to have people in for Christmas and this and that. But mostly you wouldn't see people that much on the streets. It's pretty quiet. My house was broken into a couple of times, actually. Once when I was. They're mowing the lawn and somebody came in the side door and that was later. So I guess once the traffic stopped going through, it was a very kind of gentle feeling in the neighborhood.

**Francesco De Salvador** [00:11:26] Yeah. And so were you making art during this time?

**Carol Siegel** [00:11:30] Was I making art?

**Carol Siegel** [00:11:31] Yeah. yeah. Were you doing photography or doing anything?

**Carol Siegel** [00:11:34] I actually started taking classes at Northern Virginia Community College and photography was very big there. The campus that's there now wasn't built yet, so there was a little old warehouse up in Bally's Crossroads, and it was very hard to get into the class. And the only way you could get in was to take a class and be kind of pre-registered as a student. So while I was waiting, I took a painting class, but I had painted before, I painted in college. I took, my major, was art history, and a side thing was painting and psychology. So I had some experience, but I took a class and the teacher became a very good friend and she was an artist. And then I started the photography and that was just the greatest teaching and learning experience that I had. And part of the assignments was to do some doc, you know, documentary work. I actually had a teacher who worked for the post as a photographer, so that was really the beginning of my photography. And then I put a darkroom in the basement and just started doing my own work and it changed my life.

**Francesco De Salvador** [00:13:14] So what were what photos were you taking? During this period.

**Carol Siegel** [00:13:20] The first thing that I started, I did a lot of series of different things before I did the project. But it's interesting because one of the things that attracted me was wash on the line. I would go out and we didn't have wash on the line in my neighborhood, but I found that there was public housing that's not there anymore over off Duke Street. And there were people, you know, kids playing and they have wash on the line. And I love to just wash, watch the wash, blowing in the wind and photograph that. So that was my first. And then the kids were there and I started taking pictures of the children. And so that wasn't Parker Gray, but it was a black community. And I did a lot of other little documentary or actually this was Bradley Shopping Center, which was had Murphy's five and Dime store, and there was one in Old Town. That was a big thing because they had, I think, a in there. And as they were closing and then another restaurant in Charleston was closing and the shoemaker I would document that was the people that work there.

**Carol Siegel** [00:14:48] So I had pictures of that. And so that sort of started my feeling of doing documentary things that were going to change that I wanted to capture.

**Carol Siegel** [00:14:59] So.

**Francesco De Salvador** [00:15:00] What did you find that you were drawn to in terms of subjects and topics like. What were you drawn to as a photographer?

**Carol Siegel** [00:15:11] As far as the people or.

**Francesco De Salvador** [00:15:12] The people and top? Yeah. Like what? What?

**Carol Siegel** [00:15:15] I just. I like the idea of giving voice to people that were kind of not. Seeing that. Well, you know, that were behind the scenes or I just kind of like to give voice to people that were invisible to people. You know, sometimes I think still, you know, you have a cashier, nobody pays attention. These are people, real people, which is something I still keep with me, to be sure, to talk to everybody and acknowledge who these people are and find out their stories.

**Francesco De Salvador** [00:15:57] Yeah.

**Carol Siegel** [00:15:57] So it was that was part of what I was interested in.

**Francesco De Salvador** [00:16:01] Why are you drawn? To like that subject matter. Where do you think that comes from? For you?

**Carol Siegel** [00:16:11] I don't know, actually. You know, growing up, I was an only child and probably was a little, well, very shy, actually. And I just, I had a lot of empathy for other people. I don't know where that came from. I know when I was growing up, if there was a big family. I think 12 children, you know, And they didn't they didn't have much money. And I thought, well, if I have a little extra, I want to just have I'd find money in the street and somebody. One of the kids, I said, well, let's you know, I'll share it with you. I just never wanted to be. I don't want up on anybody.

**Carol Siegel** [00:16:59] That's just don't know where that came from.

**Francesco De Salvador** [00:17:02] Mm hmm. So you're working on these projects, and so obviously, you ended up working on a project about Parker Gray and so walk us through. So how did that project begin? Yeah. Like, how did you manage to work on that?

**Carol Siegel** [00:17:24] Well, actually, I was photographing I did photograph there before I made it into a project and I asked for a grant. Because what happened was I would I would go and I would photograph like I did in the other public housing children and marsh on the line and. There was street life, that's what attracted me because I photographed before that I did a lot of projects in the city of New York. I did a project of graffiti walls, of graffiti with children in front of them, which was actually shown. It was at the Washington Area Artist Show, which was at the Corcoran. So that was my first kind of feeling like, oh, you know, these are somebody respects, my photographs. And I used to tend to people on the beach. That was a long series of just. People kind of hanging out on the beach and so I had that feeling of wanting to do a series and so on. I was looking for something and, you know, no street life, really. And it was kind of, Why do I take a picture? I don't do scenery. So that's when I discovered there was street life and I and also that the the metro was being built and things were being torn down. That was in the early eighties and that if I didn't get going and start doing something with this, it was going to be gone.

**Carol Siegel** [00:19:12] So that's what pushed me.

**Carol Siegel** [00:19:15] And then, you know, I would read about, well, they gave up grants for art projects and I knew it was going to be expensive and I wanted to make it kind of an official project. So I got a grant at least covered some of the photography expenses.

**Francesco De Salvador** [00:19:33] That's great.

**Carol Siegel** [00:19:34] Yeah.

**Francesco De Salvador** [00:19:35] So we're really quick. So what? Which metro is being built? Which metro line was being built?



**Carol Siegel** [00:19:41] Oh, well, right off the bat. Braddock Road. And they ripped down the Parker Gray, was there, and they tore that down. So then that was the historic neighborhood named after the high school there.

**Francesco De Salvador** [00:19:58] Great. And then where did you apply for a grant? Where did you apply for a grant for the project?

**Carol Siegel** [00:20:05] When?

**Francesco De Salvador** [00:20:06] No. Where? Like who?

**Carol Siegel** [00:20:08] Oh, it was through the city. There are what's called the Arts program.

**Francesco De Salvador** [00:20:14] Art Program?

**Carol Siegel** [00:20:15] Yeah. The Art Commission on the Arts. That's what it was. Yeah, I think I was on one of those. I don't know.

**Francesco De Salvador** [00:20:26] So. Well, obviously, you had. You had started to dialog with people in the neighborhood right before you even applied for this money. Right?

**Carol Siegel** [00:20:36] Right.

**Francesco De Salvador** [00:20:37] So walk us through sort of like what was the work other than obviously taking the photos? Right. What what was the work before you even touched the camera?

**Carol Siegel** [00:20:48] Oh.

**Francesco De Salvador** [00:20:48] You know, what did you do to really to start this project?

**Carol Siegel** [00:20:52] Well, the work was really meeting people that would give me kind of an opening to.

**Carol Siegel** [00:20:59] Meet the people and.

**Carol Siegel** [00:21:01] Not say what the. What? What are you doing here? And I'm not letting you take my picture. So I guess there was. I have his name, but Roger can't remember his last name and Eudora Lyles.

**Carol Siegel** [00:21:21] it's Roger.

**Carol Siegel** [00:21:22] Yeah. Yeah. I don't. Roger Anderson. And they were lifelong residents. And you Eudora Lyles and they introduced me to people and members of the community. And so it was the Alexandria Commission on the Arts that funded the program.

**Francesco De Salvador** [00:21:46] So can you describe Roger Anderson who was he? Can you describe who Roger Anderson was?

**Carol Siegel** [00:21:56] You know, Roger Anderson, I don't remember that much about Roger, because he was sort of there at the beginning and I didn't keep in touch with him. As much as I did with Eudora Lyles. So I think I have more memories of our interaction.

**Francesco De Salvador** [00:22:18] So, yeah. Let's talk about Eudora Lyles. Who was Eudora Lyles?

**Carol Siegel** [00:22:23] And well, Eudora Lyles was an activist who lived in the community and fought against actually way back, I guess, Route one, that they wanted to put it through the neighborhood.

**Carol Siegel** [00:22:38] Which they did.

**Carol Siegel** [00:22:40] Which changed that. I didn't know the neighborhood before that, but I guess it really did change things. And she was very interested in documenting what was going on there. And so she was welcomed with this project. And I think we became good friends. I could just go and visit her and I met her family. I met her grandson her daughter and we just connected. So she then introduced me to some of the other people that were, I think Helen Miller, who was a big activist in the community and her husband and just she encouraged me. And that really helped. Because I did get some discouraged a couple of times.

**Francesco De Salvador** [00:23:55] Great. So, like, what are some of your favorite memories that you had with Eudora Lyles that you can remember?

**Carol Siegel** [00:24:08] Well. I think. Sitting and just sitting and talking and feeling. She was so motherly. I have a picture of her that's in I think it's still in the New Freedom House?

**Carol Siegel** [00:24:31] I do get I get emotional thinking about her. She was just like I lost my mother early in my life and so I think I was always looking for mother substitutes. I just realize that now. So.

**Francesco De Salvador** [00:24:50] Yeah. How is she? How is she motherly, I guess.

**Carol Siegel** [00:24:53] Why? She's just caring, accepting, and encouraging. What more could you ask for? Yeah.

**Francesco De Salvador** [00:25:05] Yeah. Yeah. How does it feel to think about her?

**Carol Siegel** [00:25:12] Right. And I also felt welcome. Any time I came, she was home. I didn't have to text her because there was no cell phones those days you just showed up, which is very different than now. And that's what it was like being in that community. I could just show up in people's. Oh, good to see you. Yeah, I miss that.

**Francesco De Salvador** [00:25:42] Yeah, yeah, yeah. How would you describe that feeling like of going in?

**Carol Siegel** [00:25:49] Well, it just makes. Makes me want to cry. I didn't realize how much it meant to me, but looking back, I can tell it's still with me.

**Carol Siegel** [00:26:02] And this last few years has been so difficult with COVID and being isolated.

**Carol Siegel** [00:26:09] And getting older myself. So I think the contrast really moves me.

**Francesco De Salvador** [00:26:19] That's great. So, yeah, can you tell us what was Parker Gray. Can you describe Parker Gray. The neighborhood to us.

**Carol Siegel** [00:26:35] The Parker gray neighborhood.

**Francesco De Salvador** [00:26:36] Yeah.

**Carol Siegel** [00:26:36] Back then.

**Francesco De Salvador** [00:26:37] Yeah. Yeah, we. You give us a little tour.

**Carol Siegel** [00:26:42] Well, for one thing, I mean, there was lots of little houses, some better than others. Some were pretty rough. There. I think it's still there. The snack bar is still there on the corner and right next door live this man that I photographed. Should I talk about him or just.

**Carol Siegel** [00:27:10] In the neighborhood as far?

**Francesco De Salvador** [00:27:13] Yeah, maybe. Describe the neighborhood right now.

**Carol Siegel** [00:27:15] Well, the neighborhood was just small and. I don't know exactly what the boundaries were. I don't think that matters.

**Carol Siegel** [00:27:26] I think public housing was included in the neighborhood.

**Carol Siegel** [00:27:29] That was somewhere around here. So there was that. There was some a little nicer homes but nothing big, small, very close to each other and there was street life. There was barber shops, churches, Hopkins House was there. The Rec center, Charles Houston was there. They had Crunch munch. They had, a lot of activity. So it was a very like a microcosm of a city. Like a little New York, in a way.

**Francesco De Salvador** [00:28:14] Great. And so let's talk about the specific residents that you photographed. What are the memories you have with the residents?

**Carol Siegel** [00:28:24] Can I add something about the other the neighborhood? Yeah. I mean, something that occurred to me when I was thinking about the attraction and my own heritage and why a white woman would want be attracted to a black community, I realize. Maybe I knew it then, but more now that my family of immigrants that came over, my grandfather came over when he was 13 and the way the people live, my ancestors lived in these little communities called shtetls.

**Carol Siegel** [00:29:03] And so this maybe was like a little shtetl.

**Carol Siegel** [00:29:08] So maybe there's something in my ancestry that I didn't. You know.

**Carol Siegel** [00:29:12] Things come through you don't even know. So that I just.

**Francesco De Salvador** [00:29:16] Yeah, there's no. Thank you for sharing.

**Carol Siegel** [00:29:19] Yeah. So.

**Carol Siegel** [00:29:21] And plus. You know, being a minority, I think, is also makes me feel more compassion to people that are minority and have prejudice against them.

**Carol Siegel** [00:29:32] So I'm sure that has has something to do with that.

**Carol Siegel** [00:29:37] So anyway, back to the I was. Next to the snack bar, lived a man who was in his nineties. Tom, I think is well considered. But he was here even before. I thank you. Doral. While he was here, he said he remembered Gypsies playing. I don't know what he meant by gypsies, but he worked on the railroad. But the original, the not the metro, for sure. The regular train station railroad. I don't know what trends there were then, but. And he lived like he probably lived then. He had this, like one room downstairs, I think one room upstairs. And he had a potbelly stove that he sat by for heat and he loved me visiting him. I think he was probably pretty isolated. And he was very happy to have me take his pictures and I would bring back pictures, which was also a way I was an entree to the community because I would print pictures and bring back pictures for them, the people that I photographed, to look at and some of them probably had never even seen pictures of themselves. So that was a really special thing. Um, way before digital. And then I just went out of my way to try to find different people that were like the Boy Scout leader. I had a picture of him parading on, I guess it was, Washington's birthday but I met him before. And I tried to just do everything that the people in the community did. So I went to the church, a couple of different churches, and I went to Hopkins house. I volunteered to help out. I went to the senior center, the what they called the Crunch bunch. Anyway, it just became my community free for the year I was there. In a way I would say I felt more at home there than I did one in my own home, which made it little harder to go home.

**Francesco De Salvador** [00:32:06] So tell us about the other residents. Tell us about the other residents that you.

**Carol Siegel** [00:32:12] Oh the other residents. Let's see. Well, I tell you what. I know this may be a distraction for me because out of my eye, but I kept saying twins. Seemed like there were so many twins and there was something just so amazing to me to see two people walking alike, looking alike and walking down the street and so and I kept seeing more and more of these twins to the point where I just kind of did a little Segway and did a just a little documentary on twins, which was a special room in the exhibit. And through the twins I met people. Because I met a woman who lived in the projects and she had actually two sets of twins I just saw on the street. So I met her and she let me come in and photograph.

**Francesco De Salvador** [00:33:22] What was her name?

**Carol Siegel** [00:33:24] Her name was Ella. But I don't have her last name. I didn't interview everybody that I. Uh, photographed. Some of them I just had titles with their names and the little quote. I have a funny story about her.

**Carol Siegel** [00:33:41] I don't know.

**Carol Siegel** [00:33:43] I asked her, she said, you know, once she figured out I wasn't with some people or, you know, I was trying, I was with the police or something, you know, I had to really that and definitely a lot of her fear. Excuse me anyway, I went in and I told her I was doing twins and she said, You know, it would be okay to photograph. So my flash wouldn't work. And I said, Oh, I don't know what to do. My flash isn't working. So she called her set of twins and her older son into the living room and got him around in a circle. And held hands. And she.

**Carol Siegel** [00:34:39] I didn't know what the heck was going on, she said.

**Carol Siegel** [00:34:44] But I knew I had to be part of whatever that was she was doing. And she started looking up to the sky. Her eyes rolled back and she just started shouting in this to the devil. Devil to get out of my flash and let my flashlight work. It was just I felt like I was in a, I don't know, a tribal kind of, ancient, ritual. I didn't know whether to laugh or cry, but I was moved because I knew she was doing something to try to help me. Anyway, that was just an interesting thing that happened. And actually after we finished my flash worked, she said, "Get the devil, that devil out of my flash." That's just a little side story, but I don't know who else to talk about.

**Carol Siegel** [00:35:47] Helen Miller was very, very interesting and she had a lot of history. You know, this is a long time ago. The other person I did interview and talked to didn't live in the community, but was very much a part of the African-American community whose father was a slave. And that was Sandy Rose. So she also let me come and visit her in her house. She lived on the other side of town and she took me, I drove her, but she took me to Ocoquan, where her father grew up. And the story about him was that he walked from Ocoquan to Alexandria to become a free slave so a lot of the stories in this community were about people who had ancestors that were slaves and some of them had to swim across the Potomac to get here to become free. So that was very amazing.

**Carol Siegel** [00:37:03] It's history. Yeah

**Francesco De Salvador** [00:37:05] Great. Any other memories from the people that you photographed? Do you have any other memories.

**Carol Siegel** [00:37:15] Of the people that I photographed? well, probably all of them. Oh, well, then the woman who was in her eighties. Who I spent time with, and she told me her mother.

**Francesco De Salvador** [00:37:30] What was her name?

**Carol Siegel** [00:37:32] Uh, what was her name? What was her name? You have the thing with the title that would help me a lot. Okay. So I met Ulysses Jackson, who his mother was Lavinia Johnson, and she was the midwife for apparently a lot of people that lived in the Parker Gray. And

she told me when she was nine that her mother and she traveled on the train from Richmond and when she got to Alexandria, she said her mother said, this is the last place I'm going and she stayed ever since. And she lived with her two granddaughters and great aunt granddaughters in the same house on Patrick Street. So I met her and that was actually took her to visit her mother and photographed her at her mother's grave. Which I'm not sure the name of the graveyard.

**Carol Siegel** [00:38:40] We went through that.

**Carol Siegel** [00:38:44] And then. There was Leslie Freeman, who was 86. And he lived upstairs of the funeral home with the family of Philip Bell, who was the owner of the funeral home. And he was the third generation to live in Alexandria. His grandmother lived on Princess Street until she was 109. And while Charles and Helen Miller met at Parker Gray as teenagers. And I visited them, and were very welcoming. And they have four generations living in Alexandria. And I actually went to a wedding reception who was the granddaughter of their granddaughter, whose name was Tutsi and Kevin Gorham's. So a lot of the people, all of the other group, I just the street people that would hang out on the street, I spent a lot of time talking to them and they became not my advocates and protectors because some one time somebody tried to take my camera and they didn't give him a chance. They said, you stay away from her she's an artist and so I had like my gang protecting me, which is amazing.

**Carol Siegel** [00:40:27] Also makes me want to cry because, oh boy, so different?

**Francesco De Salvador** [00:40:33] Why do they want to make you cry?

**Carol Siegel** [00:40:35] Because it's just these are people that are so misunderstood and then they have such kind hearts. Really. Not everybody, but it's just. I'm just so emotional about the way we're living today and how challenging it has to feel.

**Carol Siegel** [00:41:01] Remember the kindness of people when there's so much meanness and ugliness. And this neighbor had that reputation. I just feel so honored that I was able to shine a light on it at that time because it's not there anymore. Sorry.

**Francesco De Salvador** [00:41:38] No, no. Don't apologize. It sounds like a powerful moment.

**Carol Siegel** [00:41:43] I just had no idea how much. I'm so grateful to you for letting me have this opportunity. It's very important in my old age. To feel like I did contribute to something. Because sometimes you wonder and question. So here I am. I don't know if I answered the question I.

**Francesco De Salvador** [00:42:18] Yeah, right.

**Carol Siegel** [00:42:19] Oh, another. well

**Francesco De Salvador** [00:42:20] We were talking about, like, memories. Memories you had with people.

**Carol Siegel** [00:42:24] Well, there's some things that are still in my life. Some of these people. Like I was walking around, I saw a woman walking with her little girl going to the laundromat. And I

asked her, could I come in because I wanted to photograph the laundromat? Could she let me photograph her with, and she, I after I explained what I was doing, she said "yes". And I have a picture of her standing just in a laundromat but there's something so beatific about that to me.

**Carol Siegel** [00:43:01] About the way she looked in that picture and she works for the city. I'm still in touch with her. We're friends on Facebook, believe it or not. And her daughter worked in one of the beauty shops I used to go to as a hair dresser assistant. So I knew her as a woman. This little girl who was, I guess, a baby, three years old. And then Rebecca and her mother, both Amanda Scott, ended up. I photographed them. They lived in the projects and they were very active in the, you know, getting, I guess, in the projects, making things okay for them. And she ended up being in one of my programs that I did at the, down at the lease center, at the senior center daycare center where I worked for 25 years after I became an expressive arts therapist. And Rebecca was in my group, I took her to see the photographs because they were shown again at that time, and she stopped at one of the photographs and kept looking and looking and she said "Well, that's my mother and my sister." So I ended up knowing them. At that time, they had passed by then, so it sort of brought my whole, feeling of connection together. That was very big for me.

**Francesco De Salvador** [00:44:53] Are there any any other memories of the people that you photographed for the project that you have?

**Carol Siegel** [00:45:02] Well, I just honestly, a lot. I just remember from the pictures. it was a beauty shops ( laugh) that was called the DIDI's beautyshop. Um, yeah, I think I went to the funeral. I went to just, the braces for the forest. The fella that I photographed was called Willie Mudd. He was the Boy Scout leader. So generally, I just remember at this point from the pictures and all the. Well, the twins, I remember, and some of the woman I mentioned who was the one with the two twins, I told her somebody was having twins. They weren't born yet. She gave me clothes to bring to the other families. So it's kind of like I even got the.

**Carol Siegel** [00:46:25] Community a little more together. I felt like a social worker. Oh, yeah? Yeah.

**Francesco De Salvador** [00:46:32] I'm curious. Like, What was most surprising for you about the project that you didn't didn't expect when you first started it?

**Carol Siegel** [00:46:45] Well, I think I was surprised how involved I got. I think I felt like, you know, this was going to be about photographs and I knew I wanted to put words with the photographs because that had always been important to me, to mix words and pictures. But I think what even now when I talk about it and I get so emotional, how much it really became part of my life at that time and how it actually changed my life. And that was because after spending a year or more taking pictures, I realized I didn't want to take pictures. I actually lost interest in photography, which seems kind of an oxymoron, you know? Strange, because here you got this like the highlight of your career and then it's like because what happened was I felt like the camera was in in my way of being with people. I felt like I had to have it in my face and couldn't be just 1 to 1 me without the camera. And so it's just that's when I decided I wanted to do something different and I went back to school and became a therapist. Expressive arts therapist. I had been teaching for seven years photography at the time that I was taking these pictures. And I still was for a year after that. But aside from that, then the dark from which I talk became almost obsolescent because of the digital

age. So the combination of those two things just made me feel like I needed to change my career, which was hard. It was hard because photography was my whole life.

**Francesco De Salvador** [00:48:52] Can you talk about your career as an art therapist here in the city.

**Carol Siegel** [00:48:58] Yeah, well, I work for an organization in Maryland called Art for the Aging where they do are with seniors who need a kind of day care, so that people that either can't be alone. And I was hired. Because well, partly they didn't have they only had a couple of people that worked in Virginia, most of them people worked in Maryland. So one of the centers was here in Alexandria and as a matter of fact, one of my freelance work, I realized before I even started this, I had done some work for them for a publication. So I spent a lot of time there and the same people work there. And practically the whole time I was there. Actually until COVID closed it. And that's when I ended up retiring because they were closed. And it was very hard for me to do things online. So that was also very engaging, an emotional experience to see again, to give people a voice. I guess that's been my feeling, my whole career.

**Francesco De Salvador** [00:50:43] Yeah. Do you have any memories of the seniors that you worked with?

**Carol Siegel** [00:50:48] Well, because one of them was that. The sister of Amanda Scott. I might block their names because it's been a while. But I have very strong memories of all the people and some of them, you know, even after they left I can remember them. But mostly, you know, at this point, I remember their faces. And I what I think is most important is when they would say, Oh, I never knew I could do this and how much it meant to them and how much, Just, encouragement it gave them. And the other thing I did with this group, which I think was very important, I wanted their work to be seen. It was great that they could do it and feel like they could do it but I thought it was very important to get it out to the community for other people to see. So a couple of things we did, we did a group at the Black History Museum. At the Martin Luther King birthday and they made art and exhibited there. And then I got the show at the city hall and they exhibited their work there. And we also later wasn't to do with Alexandria, but I got their work to a very important, we had a relationship with the Phillips Gallery and we did a piece of art based on a show at the Phillips Gallery and to this day, The Phillips Collection still has that piece in their art collection. So, you know, we got them, got them out there.

**Francesco De Salvador** [00:53:00] that's good.

**Carol Siegel** [00:53:00] Yeah. So it was very cool.

**Francesco De Salvador** [00:53:03] That's great. So I have some closing questions. But before I go to those, is anything that you want to share that I haven't asked you about today?

**Carol Siegel** [00:53:13] Well, you did ask me. I mean, one of the questions you said was, who influenced me in the documentary?

**Francesco De Salvador** [00:53:19] Yeah.



**Carol Siegel** [00:53:20] And I thought about that. I realized that I did have a lot of background and influence. Not only did I study at the Northern Virginia Community College, I took some workshops at the main photographic workshops and started with Mary Ellen Mark, who is a big, famous. I don't know if anybody knows her now, but a documentary photographer and Eugene Richards and also at the New York International Center of Photography. For that class, I had to do another project, and I did. That's when I started my beach store. I went to Coney Island and photographed there, so that was before I started this, so I had practice working with people. And then did a lot of a lot of looking at books. Dorothea Lange and so many documentary photographers. Just preparing for this interview, I looked at my bookshelves and I have just tons and tons of books of photographers that I, Cartier-Bresson you know the the big guys. So yeah I did do that. So that's all I want to add.

**Francesco De Salvador** [00:54:46] That's great. So I'm curious. So could you share what's the most important lesson that you've learned in life?

**Carol Siegel** [00:54:53] Oh, boy.

**Francesco De Salvador** [00:54:54] That's a big.

**Carol Siegel** [00:54:55] I Know, it's a big one?

**Carol Siegel** [00:54:56] Yeah. I've been thinking about that every minute I changed it.

**Carol Siegel** [00:55:03] Well, I think I learned a lot of lessons. Actually, I think COVID was a big lesson learned her how to be. Well, I don't know. Can I think about this for a sec? Because I did have something. But I have to just think for a minute because I did have some ideas.

**Carol Siegel** [00:55:43] Okay. I think one of the things that I've learned about in my old age, about my life and that I would like to pass on to younger people is that you have to prepare for your old age all your life. It happens very quickly and it's like a training. I think you have to train for it because if you don't, it isn't easy to get old and to lose some of your facility. As you know, I've had different things that I won't go into. But I think taking care of yourself, your health, exercise. I've been active all my life. I've been swimming since I'm a child and I still swim every morning. And I think that's kept my head straight through this whole covid business and so that and the other thing is do what you love and be.

**Carol Siegel** [00:56:52] With people you love because there's no.

**Carol Siegel** [00:56:55] Really. Time to waste on. Just crap. (laugh)

**Carol Siegel** [00:57:02] To.

**Carol Siegel** [00:57:03] Tell you that there's so much of that. And still every day, I can't say that I know how to live because you learn something. I feel like I learn something every day and it's a constant challenge. And the, you know, this old saying, getting old is not for sissies.

**Carol Siegel** [00:57:22] Now I know what it means. Yeah. So. Yeah.

**Carol Siegel** [00:57:26] No, that's great. That's great. I'm curious, one last question. So is that a memory you could hold on to for the rest of your life? What would that memory be?

**Carol Siegel** [00:57:40] Well, of course, being with my family and my children and doing fun things together with them and my grandchildren when they're younger. And honestly, some of the experience I've had with my career and the people that I've worked with are the highlights of my life. I've been so honored, I worked after my expressive arts degree. I did a poetry therapy workshop couple of years and I worked as my internship. I worked at St Elizabeth's Hospital.

**Carol Siegel** [00:58:28] And did poetry with women that were incarcerated with mental illness. People I would never have even known, and that, I think the camera has gotten me to those situations. I've traveled quite a bit. I've met people I went to at West Africa after I did the project, and that sort of brought everything together again, because some of the music reminded me of the church music at Parker Gray. So those are the memories of maybe meeting people that were different in that I never would have known and then I've been so honored by, I feel, just being with them. So that's what I'd like to hold on to.

**Carol Siegel** [00:59:30] Great. Great. Thank you so much, Ms. Sigel, for sharing these memories with me today.

**Carol Siegel** [00:59:36] Thank you. Thank you. Thank you for asking. It took a while, right?