



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



Project Name: *Alexandria Legacies*

Title: *Dorothy and Howard Bontz*

Date of Interview: *August 12, 2008*

Location of Interview: *Bontz Residence, The Hermitage, Alexandria, Virginia*

Interviewer: *Steve Carafora*

Transcriber: *Susan McGrath*

Abstract: Dorothy Bontz was born December 1918 in South Dakota and lived in Washington, D.C., in 1941-1942 and 1946-1948. She returned as a widow to Virginia in 1999. She describes her experiences with the War Department in Washington, D.C., at the time of the Pearl Harbor attack in December 1941, her later employment with the Strategic Air Command, and racial tensions in the late [19]40s in Washington, D.C. She also recounts how she met Mr. Bontz in August 2005 and their subsequent marriage. Howard Bontz was born in Chicago, Illinois, in June 1922. He moved to Alexandria to work as a civilian employee with the Army Systems Command in 1970 and has continued to live here to the present day. After retirement in 1984, he was active in community work, including urging the establishment of Mount Vernon Hospital, volunteering with the Alexandria Red Cross, and as a board member of the Animal Welfare League of Alexandria.

This transcript has been edited by long-time friend of Mr. Bontz, Tara Blot, in August 2012 and may not reflect the audio-recording exactly.

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Dorothy and Howard Bontz, 2008

Introductions

Steve Carafora:	My name is Steve Carafora. I'm a volunteer with the Alexandria Legacies Oral History Program. It is Tuesday, August 12, 2008, at approximately a quarter after eight—eight-fifteen in the evening, and I'm at the residence of Howard and Dorothy Bontz. They both have a connection to Alexandria in different respects, and I'm here today to get their recollections about living here in the Alexandria area. I'm conducting this interview at their residence, and they live at the Hermitage, which is located on Fairbanks Avenue in Alexandria. Both Howard and Dorothy are sitting with me now. I'm going to start by talking to Dorothy and Howard might pipe up whenever he wants to. Dorothy, can you tell me where and when you were born?
Dorothy Bontz:	Vermillion, South Dakota in December of 1918.
S.C.:	That makes you how old now?
Dorothy Bontz:	Almost ninety. I'll be ninety in December.
S.C.:	Can you tell me what brought you to Alexandria? How familiar are you with Alexandria? How long have you been here?
Dorothy Bontz:	I'm not too familiar with Alexandria. I came to Virginia from Texas, and I lived in Arlington for about six years, and becoming

	of an age when my daughter felt I needed somebody to look after me, she decided that we should start looking for retirement homes—which we did, and we settled on one in Alexandria called, The Paul Spring Retirement Home. It’s in the Mount Vernon area, a nice little home.
S.C.:	When was that?
Dorothy Bontz:	In August of 2005 I moved to Alexandria.
How Dorothy and Howard Met	
S.C.:	When did you meet Mr. Bontz?
Dorothy Bontz:	August of 2005—about, you know, a week later.
S.C.:	How did you both come to meet each other?
Dorothy Bontz:	Well, we were next-door neighbors in our retirement home, and I noted that he had two scooters parked outside his apartment. I knew he could only ride one of them at a time, so I approached him and asked him if I could buy—if one of his scooters was available to purchase and he said, “No, I don’t want to sell it.” I thought, “Oh, what an old grouch that man is.” [laughter] Well, I think I retreated to my apartment, and I got up my nerve a little later and came back and said, “Well, since you don’t want to sell it, would you consider renting it to me?” He said, “No, I don’t want to rent it or sell it.” “Okay,” I thought that was the end of a perfect friendship. [laughs; unintelligible]
S.C.:	What happened next?
Dorothy Bontz:	Well, he never told me why he wouldn’t rent it or sell it, and tells everybody now that he said if he rented it or sold it to me, he’d never see me again, and he wanted to make other contacts with me. Well, that’s his line. You know everybody has a line.
S.C.:	So when were you married?
Dorothy Bontz:	So he started calling and asking, “Would you be interested in going out to dinner with me?” I thought: well, anything would be a change from retirement home eating. So I said, “I think so.” So that’s the way we got started—going out to dinner about once or twice every week.
S.C.:	And when was it that you got married?
Dorothy Bontz:	About one year later.
S.C.:	What was the date?

Dorothy Bontz:	September 2006 we were married.
S.C.:	Thanks for the information, Dorothy. Now we are going to hone in on some areas that we've been told you have a lot of memories, recollections about. I was wondering if you could talk a little bit about what it was like to move here in the early 1940s—into the Washington, D.C., area and what your recollections are about when the attack on Pearl Harbor took place.
Dorothy Bontz:	Well, the living situation was rather bleak because...well, Washington never had enough—Washington, D.C.—residential areas for people, and, of course, it always filled up fast whenever elections turned around with all these people that came here to work in the House of Representatives or the Senate and all their employees and families, so just ordinary workers had a hard time finding—there were very few apartments available at that time. They didn't build them like they do today, and most people were renting out sections of their home for government employees—just renting out a bedroom or a bedroom and a kitchenette or whatever. But we got into a house that had been converted. The owner lived on the main floor, and she rented out all of the second floor, so that was near Dupont Circle. I lived there for about, oh, I don't know, probably about six months, and then a friend of mine from back home, Sioux City, Iowa, called me one day and said one of her roommates was getting married, and they needed somebody else to fill her space. There were three of them that lived in the apartment, and I can't even recall about where it was. It was I think on Euclid Street, so I did move in with those young women and lived there about a year and a half before I went back to Sioux City and was married there.
S.C.:	When were you married?
Dorothy Bontz:	In December 1942.
Dorothy's Work at the War Department	
S.C.:	What initially brought you to Washington, D.C.?
Dorothy Bontz:	A job with the War Department. I was summoned. Oh, you had to stay on a program or quotas from different states. They'd call on people from this state and that state and so forth, and if the quotas were full, you had to wait to be called, but I took and passed the test for stenographer and was called in May of 1941 and did come here in June 1941.
S.C.:	So June 1941 you are in Washington, D.C., and you're working for

	the War Department.
Dorothy Bontz:	Right.
S.C.:	And you were a stenographer.
Dorothy Bontz:	Well, actually, a combination stenographer and coloring artist. We made charts for booklets that were sent to department heads on the progress of what was then—I can't recall what it was called—but, you know, Roosevelt was in probably his third term as president, and he had programs going—several programs going—actually in event of war, and there was talk at that time about—even about the United States being attacked, and we had blackout nights here in the District and other large cities and in New York at that time and...can't think of what I was going to tell you.
S.C.:	You were talking about the color pictures for the booklets.
Dorothy Bontz:	One of the booklets that we prepared on a weekly basis was the progress of the War Department and the Navy Department, and I can't think of what the other departments were, but everything to do with quartermaster, materiel and things for the Army, because we were in the process—as you know and the draft was on—in the process of building up an Army and a Navy. Good thing we were. Didn't start any too soon as a few months later we were attacked by the Japanese at Pearl Harbor in December 7, 1942 [1941].
S.C.:	Speaking of that, if you don't mind, can you tell me your recollections about that day or that couple of days when word came out about the attack on Pearl Harbor.
Dorothy Bontz:	Well, I suppose everybody in the United States—especially everybody in Washington, D.C.—knew what was happening except us. They had their radios on or anything—don't believe there was television then. Myself and the three other young women that I lived with in the apartment were busy doing housecleaning, laundry, et cetera. We didn't have time to turn on the radio or anything special, so we really didn't know that we were attacked until the next morning when we went out to go to work and saw the bedlam around us. People were running in the streets, and they were all trying to flag taxis—couldn't get 'em. We went to the bus stop, had to wait quite a while, and then as people gathered, they all talked about it what had happened. That was my first knowledge of the fact that we were attacked and where Pearl Harbor—I'd never even heard of it myself at that time, but that was the situation. So we got on a bus and went to our various

	<p>working places, and when I got to work at the War Department, I discovered that most of the people there that I worked for were in the Army, and they were in partial Army dress and partial civilian dress since they didn't have complete uniforms, and the captain in our section sent secretaries out to post exchanges to buy certain articles to make their uniform complete. I forget how much time they were given to be in complete uniforms, but civilian dress was no longer available to them. We found some of the officers dressed in World War I uniforms, and as I think of it now, it was rather comical to see men wearing puttees and other World War I uniforms, and soon—it was a matter of days before they were able to get a full uniform together, and from then on they had to wear uniforms at all times.</p>
S.C.:	<p>And later that day or the next day did you hear about Pearl Harbor on the radio and in the papers?</p>
Dorothy Bontz:	<p>Oh, yes, as a matter of fact, that very day everyone went to wherever they could for lunch where there would be a radio address by President Roosevelt. So we heard Roosevelt's address on the eighth of December in a little Italian restaurant in downtown D.C., somewhere I think on G Street—can't remember where or what the name of it was, but the place was jammed. There was standing room only. Even if they couldn't serve you lunch, they allowed everybody to come in—their quota to come in—that the Fire Department would allow them so that they could all hear Roosevelt's address to the people and the nation. "We are in a state of war," so sad as it was, it was historically very interesting that day to hear Roosevelt speak. He never sounded more somber, and after lunch we went back to work. There was little we could concentrate on except the fact that we were at war—can't think of anything else that happened that day.</p>
S.C.:	<p>Did your job responsibilities change after that?</p>
Dorothy Bontz:	<p>Oh, yes. We may have been hired as secretaries, but we ended up being almost everything else but a secretary—getting things in shape as they thought they should be in case of attack, and we had drills on what to do in case of attack—crawling under your desk and simple things like that, and it was all, to me, an ignorant young girl from Iowa—they used to tease me, "Do they even wear shoes back there," to see all that was going on—interesting but terrifying to think that our country was at war.</p>
S.C.:	<p>You said that you worked at the War Department. Do you</p>

	remember what building you worked at, what the address was?
Dorothy Bontz:	Yes, when I first came to D.C., I worked at what was then known as the Munitions Building. It was down on Constitution Avenue, and there was a Navy Building directly next to it. They had been built for World War I employees—still standing. We worked there about—oh, just a few weeks while they were building a building for us which they called the War Department, but they were also working on the Pentagon at that time, and we knew that we would eventually move into the Pentagon, but shortly after working in the Munitions Building for—probably, well, from June until probably November that our building on Twenty-Third and Virginia Avenue was completed. They called it the War Department. I don't know what they call it now, but one of the times I visited Washington, D.C., afterwards I found that the building had been taken over by the State Department, so where it used to say War Department it said State Department because by that time our War Department, so-called, was Department of Defense, DOD, and had moved across the river to the Pentagon. I had one messenger duty of taking things into the Pentagon and, of course, I was terrified—big building—I didn't know where to go and find which wing and everything just to deliver some government message, but I was cleared for top secret, so I was one of the few people that they could send, and after I had that experience, I decided I don't want to work for the War Department any more. [laughs] Shortly thereafter, I went home and got married. [laughs]
S.C.:	That was a great recollection. Thank you. I'm going to go fast forward a little bit—so around 1942 you went home, got married, and then you came back to Washington, D.C., around 1946, was it?
Dorothy Bontz:	That's correct.
Racial Tensions in Washington, D.C.	
S.C.:	Can you concentrate a little bit on those years in the late [19]40s—what it was like to live in the Washington, D.C., area. I've heard that there were a lot of racial tensions, racial issues. If you could talk a little about what you recall or what you experienced in that area.
Dorothy Bontz:	Well, things were pretty bad. In those days they called themselves colored people, and then later they called themselves black, but they had this big chip on their shoulder against all whites—right or wrong. Anyway, they tried to make life as difficult as they could

	for the white people, and if they had to work with us in the government agencies, they were informed that we would all get along like civilized people. None of that would go on within our employee buildings, but as soon as you got out, things were different. They pushed and shoved. They demanded that you get up on the bus and give them a seat—things like that. In fact, they even attacked people from time to time and threw them out of a seat, so it was terrifying, and, thank heavens, things changed, but not for a long time.
S.C.:	Where were you living at that time?
Dorothy Bontz:	I was living in a rooming house near Dupont Circle—Seventeenth or Eighteenth and Q Street Northwest, and, of course, we had to eat all our meals out, and it was expensive to live in D.C. even then. That is why they quickly promoted the low-grade people, and at least they got by for another year and a half after I had a couple of promotions. That’s about all I can remember of any importance.
S.C.:	Regarding the racial tensions, did you see it going both ways? Were there offenders on both sides—both the colored side and the white side?
Dorothy Bontz:	I suppose there was, but I never saw it. I never witnessed white people being cruel to the black people, but I know, for instance, I employed a young black girl and had the misfortune of employing her on Thursday, and I found out why she always came late on Thursday. She told me that it was “Agitatin’ Day.” That was the day she had to ride the bus and agitate white people, and they did just that.
S.C.:	And you rode the bus?
Dorothy Bontz:	I did for a while, but I had to quit riding the bus and taking a taxi because of mistreatment which I won’t go into.
S.C.:	When and how long did you stay here in the Washington, D.C., area?
Dorothy Bontz:	1946, 1947, and 1948.
S.C.:	And you were working for the War Department all that time?
Dorothy’s Work with the Strategic Air Command	
Dorothy Bontz:	Well, Air Force at that time. Strategic Air Command was born out of what was the Continental Air Forces, and I think General Street [?] was its first general, and shortly thereafter, General LeMay became the Commanding General of Strategic Air Command, and

	they built a place for them out at Andrews Air Force Base, so we worked out there.
S.C.:	What was your husband's occupation?
Dorothy Bontz:	He was also working for the Air Force in the Personnel Department. He was a civilian personnel employee. He worked in the Classifications Department for several years, and then we moved from here to the First Staging Command out in California—Merced, California. We were only there about six months and then moved back to Washington, D.C.
S.C.:	When you were in Washington, D.C., you said that you periodically went across the Potomac over to Virginia to go to the Pentagon. Correct?
Dorothy Bontz:	Yes.
Old Town in 1946-1948	
S.C.:	Did you know anything about Alexandria back then—was that a place to go, a place to visit?
Dorothy Bontz:	Oh, it was told to be a very interesting, historical place, and that we could find places where Washington was supposed to have slept or Washington was supposed to have quaffed a few with his friends, and so we did come over and visit the area, and found it fascinating. Old Town was about all we saw. There wasn't much else to Alexandria. The Alexandria that we see today just did not exist. All these buildings sixty years later are new to me, so it's fascinating to see the change that has occurred here.
S.C.:	Was Old Town, back then, was it geared to tourists, were there a lot of restaurants and places like that?
Dorothy Bontz:	Not a lot, but we found what there were, and enjoyed the historic background. They even dressed in the colonial days—the waitresses would sometimes wear the little caps and wore the full-length dresses and full-length aprons over them. It was quite picturesque. We enjoyed that part of it.
S.C.:	And after you left Washington, D.C., area in 1948, you didn't come back 'til 1990? Is that it?
Dorothy Bontz:	I did not come back until then. I was married then, and we worked for what became Strategic Air Command, and the night before they decided that we would move—decentralize as many of the agencies as they could considering that Washington, D.C., may be attacked, so they would get different agencies spread around. They

	<p>moved the Strategic Air Command. We were supposed to move to Colorado Springs, Colorado, but politics played a part in that. Senator Wherry from Nebraska got them to change their mind and sent us to Omaha, Nebraska, instead of Colorado Springs, because the economy needed help in the Omaha area and other regions I guess, but that's where we ended up—in Omaha, Nebraska.</p>
S.C.:	<p>Well, we're glad that you eventually ended up here in Alexandria, and that we've had a chance to talk with you. We really appreciate it. I think Howard over here is raring to go, so right now it is around 8:35 p.m. I'm going to stop the tape a little bit, and then we'll begin talking to Howard. Dorothy, thank you so much for sharing your recollections.</p>
Dorothy Bontz:	<p>Oh, you're very welcome.</p>
S.C.:	<p>It's around twenty of nine on Tuesday evening, August 12, 2008, at the Bontz's residence, and I'm about ready to talk to Howard. Howard, just to get the ball rolling, can you tell me where and when you were born?</p>
Howard Bontz:	<p>I was born in Chicago, Illinois, in the Washington Park Hospital, and that was in June 1922.</p>
S.C.:	<p>And how long did you live there in Chicago?</p>
Howard Bontz:	<p>I lived in Chicago 1922 to 1969, and I came here with the Army to do the Systems Command in 1970. I've been with the Command from 1970 until 1984 when I retired from Civil Service with the Army.</p>
<p>Howard's Move to the Mount Vernon Area in 1970</p>	
S.C.:	<p>When you say that you came here in 1970, where exactly was that? Where's here?</p>
Howard Bontz:	<p>Well, I moved here to the Mount Vernon area and was quite active in getting a new hospital for the Mount Vernon inhabitants. In 1972 I was with the ad hoc committee that appeared before the hospital board, the Fairfax Hospital Board, an action to build the Mount Vernon Hospital.</p>
<p>Howard's Volunteer Work with the Alexandria Red Cross</p>	
S.C.:	<p>Now another thing we are told that you were involved with close to home in the Del Ray neighborhood was the Red Cross. Can you tell us a little bit about your connection to the Red Cross?</p>
Howard Bontz:	<p>Well, with the Red Cross after I retired—I was looking for</p>

	<p>something that might keep me busy, and I thought of the Red Cross, and I volunteered. I had a van at the time, and it came in very helpful because we moved food from the—this was prepared food—we moved it from the Chapter House to the area where they had homeless people such as the Carpenter’s Shelter. I did that once a month for over twelve years. Also, whenever they collected food—volunteers would collect food for the Red Cross—I would go pick up the food that was volunteered to everyone and took it to the central location, which at that time was the Salvation Army Headquarters in Alexandria.</p>
S.C.:	<p>[unintelligible] about Chapter House for the Red Cross?</p>
Howard Bontz:	<p>The Chapter House in Alexandria was in Old Town and was right in back of Christ Church, and I wasn’t there very much. The only time I went there was to pick up cots and blankets and essentials for people that had been burned out of their homes or flooded out and, in some cases, smelled out because of sewage backup.</p>
S.C.:	<p>But that place was the headquarters for the local Red Cross? Was that what was in that building?</p>
Howard Bontz:	<p>That was the headquarters for Alexandria Red Cross. The Main Office was downtown Washington.</p>
S.C.:	<p>And you said that you got involved with the Red Cross soon after you retired?</p>
Howard Bontz:	<p>Yes, after 1984—probably 1985 that I got involved with ’em, and they learned that I knew how to drive a truck, so I used to drive the emergency response vehicle which has a small cabinet for our food and also coffee.</p>
S.C.:	<p>Now was there a Red Cross building or a branch in the Del Ray neighborhood?</p>
Howard Bontz:	<p>It was the only office that I knew of—trying to think of the name of the street, but I can’t remember the name of the street, but it was a free-standing building, and it was quite active in the area. We used this emergency response vehicle locally for fires and so forth and [a lot] were sent out to various floods [unintelligible]. I didn’t go on those. I was just local.</p>
S.C.:	<p>And this three-story building you mentioned, it was in the Del Ray neighborhood? I’m just trying to make sure I understand. Where in the Del Ray neighborhood was there was a Red Cross Building? Was there one in the Del Ray neighborhood?</p>

Howard Bontz:	Not that I knew of. The only thing we did we parked when we didn't use the vehicle. We parked it over at the fire station in Del Ray.
S.C.:	Now did you live in the Del Ray area?
Howard Bontz:	No, I've always lived, until I retired, I lived in the Mount Vernon area. In fact, I almost backed up to the Mount Vernon Estate.
S.C.:	And so what brought you to Del Ray eventually? When did you first start to live in the Del Ray area?
Howard Bontz:	I never did. From my home—[interruption; tape changed]
S.C.:	Howard, you were talking about you and your wife down in Mount Vernon?
Howard Bontz:	We decided that we couldn't keep up with the house. We were getting too old, so we moved to Paul Spring Retirement Home. My wife was very ill, and she passed away April 2005. I continued to live at Paul Spring, and after several months went by, another Dorothy moved in next door, and she came over. She understood that I had two electric scooters, and she came over and wanted to know if I wanted to sell it, and I told her, "No, I didn't want to sell it," and she was very upset by that, but I asked her out to dinner and explained that she could get a—free from Medicare—a brand new scooter, but she could use my second scooter until she got her replacement scooter. However, she still rides on that original scooter. [laughs] That's a great—
S.C.:	Before we leave the Red Cross topic to a new topic, you mentioned about how you drove the truck a lot. Can you tell me what a typical route would have been—a typical route that you would have driven a truck on during a typical day?
Howard Bontz:	I had to come down the drive alongside the Potomac River into Alexandria, and then I had a map of Alexandria, and I go to wherever the Fire Department told me to go. In some cases I had to go back to the Chapter House to pick up articles, cots, and personal kits. I also had to take meals, prepared meals, from the Chapter House to Carpenter Shelter, feeding the homeless. We had enough meals for about a hundred and twenty-five people.
S.C.:	And again when you say Chapter House that's the one on—that's the one next to Christ Church?
Howard Bontz:	What was that?

S.C.:	When you say the Chapter House, I just want to make sure I know which house that was. Was that the one next to Christ Church?
Howard Bontz:	It's in back of it.
S.C.:	Back of it—okay. When you did these truck drives, did you drive yourself or did you have other people driving with you?
Howard Bontz:	I drove. I drove myself. Sometimes I'd get help on the truck, but that was very rare.
S.C.:	Do you remember the names of any people—men or women—that you worked with at the Red Cross?
Howard Bontz:	No, I don't. It's been so many years now. I just don't remember.
S.C.:	How about—everyone has some kind of a story that, you know, is real funny or just—do you remember any particular event or particular situation you were in when you were making a delivery or that comes to your mind?
Howard Bontz:	I don't—
S.C.:	I guess unfortunately a lot of times you saw sad cases. You were helping people. Were there a lot of people in need?
Howard Bontz:	Oh, yes. You always had a full house at Carpenter Shelter, and lots of 'em went over to Christ House, and we had meals that we served and on various occasions like Christmas coming up and also prior to that Halloween—things like that to entertain the homeless people, and we were quite surprised—my wife and I both looked at that—and we were quite surprised at the number of people who were homeless in Alexandria. Every night when we went over to Christ House, there was always a line of men waiting to get in for dinner.
S.C.:	And this would be around when? What year?
Howard Bontz:	Must be on Prince Street. I'm getting old. I don't remember all these places anymore.
S.C.:	And you mentioned Carpenter's Hall?
Howard Bontz:	Carpenter's Shelter.
S.C.:	Where was that?
Howard Bontz:	Well, it's moved several times. It's wound up now on [unintelligible] right by the Post Office, and I used to haul the meals—it's about four blocks from the Red Cross Chapter House

	<p>to Carpenter’s Shelter, and we had cartons, containers to carry about a hundred and twenty-five meals up there, and after we got them unloaded, I’d go inside and have to serve the meals.</p>
<p>Howard’s Association with the Animal Welfare League of Alexandria</p>	
<p>S.C.:</p>	<p>Let’s move on from the Red Cross and try another organization that you did a lot of work with, did a lot of work for—the Animal Welfare League. Can you tell me how you got involved with that group?</p>
<p>Howard Bontz:</p>	<p>Well, I got involved with them when I found a little dog—scared to death on the median strip on the Beltway. I picked him up and drove him to Alexandria and tried to find the animal shelter. Nobody seemed to know where the shelter was. Finally, I found a sign pointing down the street to the Animal Welfare League, so I went down there and went in with the dog and turned the dog over to the shelter. The lady that I talked to was the adoption officer for the Animal Welfare League. She was not a city employee, and she talked to me for a while and she asked me why I couldn’t find the place, and I told her. I said that I went all over and nobody knew where it was. I said they should do this and do that—several different things, and she said, “Would you like to tell the board about it?” and I said, “All right, I can do that,” and to me she said, “Right now. Go upstairs.” So I went upstairs, presented my ideas to the board and went back downstairs afterward. Two minutes later the president of the board came down, and she asked me if I would come on the board, so I went on the board in 1980 in January.</p> <p>About two or three years later I became treasurer, and at the time I took over there were no formal books. They just had pieces of paper with entries on how much money they had in their bank and it wasn’t very much. So we started expanding upon the people who were members, and the way we did that was to subscribe to the <i>Alexandria Journal</i>, and my wife and I sat down at the computer that was donated to the League, and we’d go through the <i>Journal</i> every week, and we’d pick out the new homeowners, and we’d put that on our list. We built the list up to twenty-four thousand people, and we started sending out newsletters to the twenty-four thousand people, and we were surprised—tremendously surprised—at the response. In fact, right now I think we still have about twenty-four thousand people even though a lot of people have moved out of town and new people have moved in.</p>

S.C.:	And what was the subject of the newsletter?
Howard Bontz:	Well, it talked about various things that the League was doing and how we needed help financially, and we wanted to build the Animal Welfare League in hopes of taking over the shelter from the Police Department. We finally did take over in—must have been [19]89 the City Council voted to give us a contract to operate the shelter, and we've been very successful with that. In fact, we've never had to ask for any money. Each year the City Council votes the same amount as we had the previous year plus five, ten, fifteen per cent more, and they finally decided to build the new shelter, and they asked us to chip in, and we chipped in six hundred thousand of the two million, six hundred thousand cost of the new shelter that's now located on Eisenhower Avenue. It's a beautiful place, a beautiful building, and people should come and see it, and we changed the hours. We changed our hours to twelve noon until 8:00 p.m. so that people could come in—didn't have to worry about their jobs. They could come in during the day and look at the animals and adopt them hopefully. It's still a wonderful place to be.
S.C.:	Now when you started your first contact with the League, where were their offices? In the same building?
Howard Bontz:	They were on the second floor of an old building on South Payne Street, and the building had been a home at one time. It had been changed a little bit. It really never worked out as an animal shelter. Now we've got a beautiful animal shelter.
S.C.:	Do you remember where the next place they moved from the South Payne address?
Howard Bontz:	Don't remember exactly where that was. [They didn't move elsewhere until they went to Eisenhower Avenue in 2002.]
S.C.:	Now you said that you were the treasurer on the board. Were you a volunteer all those years or were you paid?
Howard Bontz:	Yes. I didn't receive a penny. I was a volunteer, and everybody else on the board was a volunteer, and we had a retired Air Force Colonel who a lot of people remember.
S.C.:	What were some of the typical projects or things that the League did?
Howard Bontz:	The first thing that we did we started out with what we called Canine Olympics, and the first one got rained out. It was supposed

	<p>to be in May, so we postponed it to Labor Day weekend, and in the meantime, the Olympic Committee, the National Olympic Committee, heard that we were going to have Canine Olympics, and they threatened to take us to court for using the name Olympics, so we changed it to Canine Games, and Alexandrians know it as the Canine Games.</p>
<p>S.C.:</p>	<p>And what year was the first one?</p>
<p>Howard Bontz:</p>	<p>The first one was in 1991 or '92 and by [19]97 it had gotten to pretty good size, and we had about fifty people volunteering to set up all the different hurdles and benches and everything that was necessary. In addition to the Canine Games, we invited people to our dinner—annual dinner. When I first started, in 1980, we had maybe thirty-five or forty people come to the dinner. Now we have three hundred come to the dinner, and the city itself, the members of the city, people that live here now are animal conscious. In fact, we are the first city on the East Coast that ever had an open house or happy hour for dogs. Every week about two or three nights a week there'd be some restaurant that had out on the veranda or whatever an open house for dogs, and it was a happy hour for dogs, and we got lots of recognition all over the country in newspapers about care for animals. It was really something to see—all these dogs around the tables and everything licking drinks and food. It was great.</p>
<p>S.C.:</p>	<p>When did that start? Round when did that project begin?</p>
<p>Howard Bontz:</p>	<p>That started in the [19]90s, 1990s, and they still do it. In fact, my wife and I went on a honeymoon to a hotel on King Street, and they have a big plaza in the middle of the hotel. It's a courtyard you might say, and they cut it out because they changed hands, but, lo and behold, there were so many people that complained about that. They wanted it to come back, so we now have it back. It's now a Moroccan—Hotel Morocco [Hotel Monaco] something like that. They have the open house there, what do you call it—happy hour, happy hour for animals.</p>
<p>S.C.:</p>	<p>Now what I'd like to do is go back earlier with the League. Was it rough at first, was it difficult to get people involved or to—?</p>
<p>Howard Bontz:</p>	<p>Well, at first, it was very difficult, but we kept coming out with these newsletters and put banks at all the veterinarians—little toy banks, and it was advertised. Everybody that came in saw <i>Animal Welfare League</i>, and the donations started coming in, and the more we beat the drum, you might say, got their attention. Our ads also</p>

	<p>got out on the cable TV channel. Channel 10 I think it was, and I would visit various points on interest. I would be the emcee. We showed the animals in George Washington's time and the present time. We went to the Fort Belvoir military police kennels, and we showed the dogs in training there and how they behaved—how they reacted to guns. I went to the Wildlife Federation, and they showed how to build bird feeders out of milk cartons and things of that nature, and it was quite popular. I had nineteen different shows. I would show repeats twice a week. It got the people's attention. Contributions started coming in, and we were able to do things that we hadn't been able to do before. We had recognition from the Humane Society of the United States for being one of the best kennels in the West Coast—East Coast, I'm sorry. The West Coast has better ones, but they put more money into 'em—much more.</p>
<p>S.C.:</p>	<p>I think I've heard that somewhere along the line that things got kind of political. Were the politicians involved at all with the League?</p>
<p>Howard Bontz:</p>	<p>Well, they supported us very much, so when we first started out asking the City Council to approve a new building, then the friend of everybody, Jim Moran, he was the mayor, and Jim moved on to become the congressman and [unintelligible].</p>
<p>S.C.:</p>	<p>You were talking about the City Manager, Howard.</p>
<p>Howard Bontz:</p>	<p>The City Manager was quite helpful, and she had a dog that she adopted from the shelter, and they finally named it after her. At the moment I can't think of her name [Vola Lawson], but she was a big help.</p>
<p>S.C.:</p>	<p>Were there any particular difficult times that the League had or — you know, real challenges—</p>
<p>Howard Bontz:</p>	<p>Well, the biggest problem we had was to decide how to handle the carcasses, the dead animals. The choice was putting in an incinerator or send 'em to the [unintelligible] rendering plants. It turned out that we couldn't afford to burn—cremate the animals. It just was too much money, and there's been some objection to that, but I don't know what else we could do. We get a lot of people that say we put the animals to sleep. We sometimes have no choice. What can you do with an old, sick animal—badly injured animal. You can't help them—even vets say they cannot do anything for them. What else can you do with them? If you tried to keep them on forever, it just wouldn't work. If the costs were a million dollars</p>

	one year, the next year if we kept the same number of dogs, it would be two million, year after that it would be four million, year after that it would be eight million. Just could not possibly be, and people, some people don't seem to understand that, but there are a lot of people that support us and the job they do.
S.C.:	Are you still active with the League?
Howard Bontz:	Well, yes, I am here. I'm in the Hermitage, and I bring in friends that have visiting dogs, microchipped dogs, and once I had a rehabilitator in here with live raptor birds and brings around, and holds the birds right in front of you. If you've never seen a hawk or an owl right up close, there it is—right there in front of you.
S.C.:	You said something about “chick” dog.
Howard Bontz:	I'm sorry—
S.C.:	The kind of dogs that you bring here—I thought you said something like “chick” dog.
Howard Bontz:	Yeah, visiting dogs [pet therapy dogs].
S.C.:	Visiting dogs?
Howard Bontz:	Yeah, they come in and they circulate in the people that are there. We have one dog in particular dog that belongs to Linda Willen, the previous Director of the Arlington Shelter. The dog's name is Mellow Yellow. Guess what breed it is? And it's a beautiful dog. It goes around from one person to another and wants to be petted. It's just wonderful.
S.C.:	You sound very passionate about animals. Did you have animals when you were growing up? How did you come—?
Recalling Pets	
Howard Bontz:	I had one little Pekinese when I was growing up—had her for eight years. A Pekinese is a lap dog, but this little dog, she wasn't a lap dog. I used to put her on the back of my bike, ride around town with her, and she finally died of old age, and I didn't have another dog until I got married, and that was one of the reasons that I was attracted to my first wife. She had this beautiful collie, and it's Calumet Powder Pow Wow—Powder for short—Pow really.
S.C.:	Calumet Power—
Howard Bontz:	Calumet Powder Pow Wow.
S.C.:	That was the dog's entire name?

Howard Bontz:	<p>Well, it was a championship breed, but she had a defect in her bone structure. It didn't interfere with her walking or running or anything like that, and her brain—she was one of the smartest dogs I've known, and the problem was that when we moved here, we drove from Chicago to the Mount Vernon area, and on the way we'd make stops—the various stopping places, and apparently, other dogs had been there before her, and they'd spread disease and [unintelligible] whatever, and old Powder caught it, and just about a couple of weeks, she was gone, but then we moved into this home.</p> <p>It was my wife, and her mother, and I, and the kids next door to us, they came over and said that they'd found this little dog, and they couldn't find the owner. Could we keep it until they find the owner? Well, that was Whiskers, and we had Whiskers for the rest of his life. He lived to be fourteen, fifteen years old, and the funny part of it was we didn't know what to call him—what kind of a name for him. One day her Mother and Dottie and I were doing the dishes—washing and drying them—and she said to me, “He looks like a little old man with whiskers,” and you heard this, “Yip,” and in the doorway stood Whiskers, and I said, “Say that again.” She said, “He looks like a little old man with whiskers.” The minute she said whiskers, he yipped. So we knew that was his name, and we kept him for fourteen years. But then after that I adopted animals from the shelter. One of them was three-legged and the name Pegleg—that didn't sound so good, so I called her Peggy, and she was like a mother to the other dogs, and I had Honey, and I had Alfie, and I had two cats. One I named Bobby and the other Bobbette.</p>
S.C.:	What breed was Whiskers?
Howard Bontz:	Hah! Heinz fifty-seven varieties. He was basically a little like a terrier type animal, and Peggy was a combination—a very unusual one—corgi and German shepherd and [unintelligible] he was a shepherd—looked quite a bit like [unintelligible]. He was the same as Whiskers, same breed, and but once you get into some of these stray dogs, who knows what their breed is?
S.C.:	We're winding down time. You know you said that you're still active with the Animal Welfare League. How about the Red Cross? Do you do anything with the Red Cross anymore?
Howard Bontz:	Not the Red Cross now. It was physical work with the Red Cross. With the Animal Welfare League [unintelligible]. I used to be the

	<p>emcee in Market Square, and I would get up on the stage there, and I would announce various acts or whatever, and I arranged programs that would come down to Market Square, and at one time, I helped promote the Riverfront Festival. It was named close to one the Red Cross has. It isn't the same. I arranged for a few contacts. I arranged for the Coast Guard to have their drill team appear. I contacted various children's dance schools or gymnastics schools to come in and give performances. I arranged for the Army guard dogs to come down and perform. I arranged for police dogs in Alexandria and in Fairfax County to come in and show their skills in looking for drugs and all kinds of stuff.</p>
S.C.:	<p>It's been wonderful interviewing Dorothy and Howard, and who knows; maybe they'll want to talk again in the future sometime. We'll see how that goes, but I thank them for welcoming me into their home. Thank you. [End]</p>