



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



Project Name: *Alexandria Legacies*

Title: Interview with John D. Pierpoint

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Location of Interview: Alexandria Archaeology Museum

Interviewer: Jen Hembree

Transcriber: Jen Hembree

Abstract: John D. Pierpoint was born in Hume Springs in 1928. Mr. Pierpoint recounts stories surrounding his family's home in the Hume Springs area, as well as his grandfather's heating business and helping out with his uncle's store. Sharing memories of his boyhood paper route via bicycle, and his experiences as a teen working at the Torpedo Factory, Mr. Pierpoint paints a vivid portrait of Alexandria and its streets during the 1930s and early 1940s. During the interview, memories of dating, the prom and meeting his wife, Pauline are also fondly remembered.

Acknowledgments:

"I want to acknowledge the Pierpoint, Beall, Conlon Families, and especially my favorite cousin, Joan Conlon Tuthill."

~ John D. Pierpoint, June 2006.

This interview has been edited by the interviewee and may not reflect the audio-recording exactly.

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*John D. Pierpoint, 2005
(credit: Alexandria Archaeology)*

Hume Springs Memories

Jen Hembree:	Today is Saturday, December 10. My name is Jennifer Hembree. And I am here with Mr. J.D. Pierpoint. We are at the Alexandria Archaeology Museum. We are here to talk about J.D.’s memories of growing up in Alexandria and working at the Torpedo Factory, and anything else he wants to share. Mr. Pierpoint, would you mind stating your name for the record.
J.H.:	Do I have permission to record this interview?
John D. Pierpoint:	Yes, you do.
J.H.:	Great. I’m going to stop the tape and make sure it’s working properly. [Tape stops and Starts.] My first question to ask [of you] is, “Could you tell me where and when were you born?”
John D. Pierpoint:	My birth certificate reads Humes Spring, Virginia, which is close to Russell Road and Glebe Road. The actual place of birth was Alexandria Hospital, but during the Depression we lived with my granddaddy Beall and grandmother Beall in the area now that is St. Rita’s School. My Aunt Helen Conlon owned the property adjacent to that, which is now St. Rita’s Church. And during those early days the soldiers from Fort Myer used to come down and stop in front of my Aunt Helen’s house. My cousin Joan and I used to go out and give ‘em water and the soldiers let us pet the horses. The field there

was big - near Presidential Gardens. Of course, it was a big cow pasture. Other side of that was a place called Sunnyside - a black development - and a woman named Aunt Lucy was the charge of that group of people and the other one's name was Nellie. She [Aunt Lucy] had white hair and she was a slave in the early days and they used to exchange apple jelly - my aunt and her [pause] We had to go home and get inside when the gypsies came and stopped in the field there and at the door for well water.



*J. D.'s ancestors' store (The McFarland's) at 801 N. Washington Street, 1895
(courtesy J.D. Pierpoint)*

J.H.:	Who were the gypsies?
John D. Pierpoint:	People in wagons looking for well water, vegetables and chickens, and not necessarily in that order. They cooked in a big black kettle. Colorful wagons. They had little Spanish-type uniforms. Bandanas around their waste and all. Women with real black hair. Gypsy-looking. [Pause] Course we had quite a few apple trees. We used to bake our own apple cider.
J.H.:	Did you have any other kinds of vegetables or fruit?
John D. Pierpoint:	Yes. Grape vines and many apples. Granddaddy raised chickens and had a vegetable garden. Had his own little wine cellar. A little Italian red. He made his own wine too. My mother used to test it every now and then [to] see if it was any good.
J.H.:	What did she say? Was it good!?

John D. Pierpoint:	Yea, she got to be pretty good taster. And grandmother used to make root beer. The old days, the old people made root beer and bread.
J.H.:	How did they make it [root beer]?
John D. Pierpoint:	They used to put a cork in it and put it along the sunshine there and grandmom - the first thing she'd say was "Don't touch my root beer." ...Then we'd go down to the creek and get a snapping turtle. And I'd take a stick and the turtle would bite the stick and granddaddy would cut his head off and make turtle soup. His favorite thing was possum. He loved possum. He'd feed a possum scraps for weeks on end and get him ready to go to the pot. Sometimes I'd let 'em out.... The rooster, "Red Rooster," didn't like me - the little rooster in the hen house. He chased me one time, pecked me... Mom had loves: church, nuns, playin' cards with her friends at Rose's. My dad had Redskin tickets... In 1940 we moved to Alexandria. Things were a little better. Dad got a job in the post office.
The Move to Alexandria (1940)	
J.H.:	In Alexandria?
John D. Pierpoint:	The Alexandria Post Office. He [Daddy] worked his way up to be superintendent of Memorial Station by the Masonic Temple My mom ended up retiring [from] the Post Office also and she [Mom] later became an examiner for the Civil Service Commission. Mr. Carter trained her.
J.H.:	Where did you move to when you moved into Alexandria?
John D. Pierpoint:	We moved to 226 South Lee Street, which was owned by Ollie Simpson, the city jailer. He offered to sell dad that property for \$2500 in 1939. Later Polly Hulfish refinished it and sold it for \$750,000.... When I was in Alexandria I used to go carry the <i>Gazette</i> and the <i>Washington Times</i> , I mean <i>Washington Post</i> --and the <i>Gazette</i> . We had to wait on the paper --cause the press was always breakin' down. We used to play in the alley. There used to be Hulfish's Hardware Store directly next to it [the press] and the jail was in the back end where we played. The prisoners use to yell out the windows to us to get 'em a pack of cigarettes and Charlie Miller, my neighbor, he kept track of the pigeons, made sure the population didn't get too big. He was a good policemen. Up here on North Lee Street, we used to have our boat tied up in later years. Near Oronoco Bay.
J.H.:	Is this your family's boat?
John D. Pierpoint:	And that's all poisonous area at one time because they used to make cyanide to go on the railroad tracks. [In] the old days, they'd flush it right on the track....But we still kept our boat up there.
J.H.:	Was this your family's boat?
John D. Pierpoint:	No, this is a group of boys from Westover - off Powhatan Street,

	including Dan Klinkert. There used to be a power plant next street over. Up this way [pointing to map.] A friend of mine used to ride me on my bike to take his brother Walter supper from the family home on Pitt Street. We used to hop trains around Alexandria as they came down through the tunnel - Wilkes Street, went down to the Power Plant which was on the south end of the town at that time where the Ford Motor Plant is - where those million dollar houses are, there used to be a power plant. [indicating location on map.] [Pause] It was between Windmill Hill and the shipyard. That's Gibbon Street, probably - before Franklin [Street].
J.H.:	That's where the tunnel was?
John D. Pierpoint:	The tunnel's at Wilkes Street - still exists on Wilkes Street. [looking at map again.] Windmill Hill - they tested the jeep right there. The United States Army Jeep. I watched them test it at the hill. See if it worked.
J.H.:	Do you remember when that was?
John D. Pierpoint:	It had to be 1940 probably, [19]40 or 1941, probably.
J.H.:	You were a kid?
John D. Pierpoint:	Yea. Here's Windmill Hill. Of course my paper route went there - extended all the way down Lee and Fairfax and Royal. I didn't do too much on Royal but my paper route went down [looking at map]: it came and went down Lee, to Franklin, down Franklin to Fairfax and up Fairfax to Prince Street.
J.H.:	You'd do this on your bicycle?
John D. Pierpoint:	Yea. I'd get on my bike.
J.H.:	Do you remember how much you got paid a week, for the route?
John D. Pierpoint:	No. I was always short; my mom paid [the difference]. Well, when I came into the Torpedo Plant - 52 cents an hour. I quit school and 52 cents an hour looked pretty good.
J.H.:	Is that why you decided to quit school?
John D. Pierpoint:	That and some hazardous things going on. I couldn't get with the schoolwork, that's all. [looking at map] 200 block of South Royal Street used to be Armory where I was telling you Colonel Ed Harlowe used to be the doorman and it was a very small gym and the guys could run out on the street sometimes [playing basketball] when they come through real fast. I got to see all the policemen play and they had a good team.
J.H.:	Did they play the fireman?
John D. Pierpoint:	They played a league. They had firemen and policemen and they had a mixed assortment of guys like Leitch Art Welders. The weld[ers] had a team.
J.H.:	Was your dad on the postal service team?
John D. Pierpoint:	No. My dad was on the Alexandria Celtics. Alexandria High school

	and also the Old Dominion Boat Club. They had a good team every year. Almost everyone in Alexandria played on Boat Club or Celtics. [Pause] Granddaddy had a business at one time on South Patrick Street –a heating business. Trains came down King Street and a man would put the radiators off at King and Patrick. Dad got off at school and he'd come and haul the radiators down to 114 South Patrick Street where Dad lived and him and his Dad would go in the next day and put the radiators in homes. His brother Walter, he was busy. He was chasing the women. He had a new car. I'm not sure exactly what kind of car he had, but he didn't help do any radiators, but he came to our wedding at St. Joseph's. That was beyond him. Later, he owned loan companies in Cleveland. He did pretty good for himself.
Working at the Torpedo Factory	
J.H.:	Do you want to tell me what it was like when you first came to the Torpedo Factory to work?
John D. Pierpoint	First thing, came in the door and I was always late. You had to flip a tag with a little number
J.H.:	Which door did you have to come in?
John D. Pierpoint	The north end by Cameron Street. Flip a little tag. Had your name on it. Your name was behind the tag. If you flipped it, your name was covered - your number was covered. If you didn't, you weren't there. It was very easy for the timekeeper - she'd just walk out and see who was exposed there and if people [were] not at work. Pretty clever.
J.H.:	What happened if you weren't there? Would she call you?
John D. Pierpoint	It was wartime, you could get called up and they could take care of, do something to you. I got sent to Navy Yard in Washington, but I quit after six weeks. Luckily VJ day came and I went to the Army...The marines used to have a barracks on top of this roof [the Torpedo Factory] here with artillery. And that's how a friend of mine met her husband. He was a marine sergeant and she worked in personnel. She later became Miss War Savings Bond queen.
J.H.:	That's exciting. Did you know her back then?
John D. Pierpoint	I knew her from 1940 when she moved from Boston. We lived across the street from one another on Glebe Road. Her father later went on to be an officer in the Navy -- good Christian family... on South Pitt Street.
J.H.:	What was your job when you worked here at the Torpedo Factory as a young man?
John D. Pierpoint	Yeah, that was really something. I was 16. And all these women around me with hairnets. But they all wore blue hairnets because of their hair -- because of the danger with machines.
J.H.:	Did they have uniforms?

John D. Pierpoint	They had the blue bonnet on to protect their hair. I don't think so 'cause Mary Kerns was directly with me and she was from Manassas. She was beautiful. Her job was to see that I timed?? these starter-reducing valves properly. About eight or ten girls [were] working in the shop until I left. Out on the floor. And I had a big bucket with handles on it. I was apprentice machinist. My job was to pull the bucket of water up over the top of that starter-reducing valve and then put the pressure on - 1000 pounds of pressure - I don't know what it was. And Mary would time it for leaks, for bubbles. If it leaked, we took it back to the girls and they relapped all the parts to that valve. They hated it. It was shaped like a - was about a foot long - and had little valves sticking out of it. Al Beeson was my shop foreman - Shop 13.
J.H.:	Did it happen often? Were there a lot of leaks?
John D. Pierpoint	There were some. Not as many as you'd think. But Mary Kerns. Nobody bothered Mary. She straightened 'em out. A lot of men later, I saw working as butchers in the different, various Safeway, Sanitary's. Where they lost their jobs after the war and had to find something to do.
J.H.:	How long did you work here?
John D. Pierpoint	Three months. They transferred me to the Navy Yard. Then the war ended in August of '45. I babysat for a while and then I went in the Army. Served in Korea. Came home and met my wife from Cleveland. She was living with four other girls on North Pitt Street. I started dating her girlfriend. And then I met her through her girlfriend.
Dating	
J.H.:	Where were you living at the time?
John D. Pierpoint	I was living on Colonial Avenue at that time. [incomprehensible].
J.H.:	Were you living with your friends or your siblings?
John D. Pierpoint	No. I was living with my parents. The old days, girls could get apartments, but the boys couldn't. That's right. Very few boys lived together in apartments. They stayed home with mom and dad till the last minute. The girls got out on their own. [incomprehensible]. The biggest girl division was at Arlington Farms. I dated about ten girls out there. All of the halls were named after states. All these girls that came from different parts of the country and went to work at various halls and Kansas was our biggest, our best hall - that's where we met the most girls.
J.H.:	Where was Arlington Farms?
John D. Pierpoint	It was below Arlington Cemetery - below the Navy building. In that part of Arlington.
J.H.:	You had a car at this time? Is that how you got around?

John D. Pierpoint	No. Pat Barry a buddy of mine had a car. A big Nash. We'd double-date most the time. Sometimes we did triple-date. Or even four on a date. There were that many girls. We could pick from 5,000 girls at Arlington Farms. We'd all go to Rosslyn Hot Shoppe and try to keep out of trouble with Washington-Lee 'cause that was our rival school. Mostly swim in the river there in the daytime. We rented boats. We'd rent a boat for about a dollar and a half. Then we got our own boat and started rowing up and down the river.
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J.H.:	What did the boat look like? Was it a sailboat?
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*The Pierpoint Boys, 1945 in Westover
from left to right: Bob, Tom, J.D., Paul and Mike
(courtesy J.D. Pierpoint)*

John D. Pierpoint	It was a rowboat. Initiation fee was to take a newcomer across the river there by the bridge - where the bridge is now. Went out to the sandbar and leave him. We had a signal. We'd leave the poor guy and then he'd [be] crying and carrying on.
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J.H.:	Did they have to swim back?
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John D. Pierpoint	No. They couldn't swim. Half of 'em. We had to go back and get 'em. We just came across toward the Old Dominion Boat Club and turn around and go back and pick 'em up... During the war, there used to be trains going across this bridge - used to be a bridge right up here by the Calvert House - by Slaters Lane. We used to lay up there and watch troop trains go by. Everything was blacked out. All the shades were down on the windows so it was completely black. We used to sit there and watch those. A lot never came back from that place. They were going up to New Jersey. To Camp Kilmer or Fort Dix. This Bobby Hatton - a boy I ran around with - he had a house right on the bank there where the train crossed over
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	Jeff[erson] Davis Highway, came out of Fort Belvoir, came up the Pennsylvania Railroad tracks and on into Potomac Yards and then slid on across by Potomac Mills now - just south of Potomac Mills is where the train came across.
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Work Memories

J.H.:	I think you mentioned that one of your later jobs was on the railroad?
John D. Pierpoint	Yea, I was a railway mail clerk in 1949.
J.H.:	Where was this at?
John D. Pierpoint	They offered me a job [on the] Philadelphia - Norfolk on a Railway Mail train. I served on the ACL, Seaboard, and Southern Railroad. My father told me not to take it. To take the Airmail Field in Washington so I spent -- of the 41 years I had in the postal service, I spent 40 years at the AMF Airmail field in Washington.



*J.D. (left) and Bill Woods (right) upon retirement, after 40 years of service with the Post Office, AMF Airmail field
(courtesy J.D. Pierpoint)*

J.H.:	You said you had to take an exam to get this job?
John D. Pierpoint	It took four hours to get this job. My dad put me in for the examination - he said it only came every ten years - it was a good job at that time. Later, the post office took us in, [like the] Army taking over the Rangers. We would consider ourselves better than the post office. We had about ten exams a year. [Studied] every state in the country. But I want to point out here on the 200 block of King Street, right down just below Burke and Herbert Bank was a pool

	room, called Battalion Pool Hall.
J.H.:	Battalion? Did you hang out there?
The Paper Route/ Teenage Memories	
John D. Pierpoint	We hung out there as young boys. Then my aunt lived at 801 N. Washington Street and the streets were unpaved behind her. And the black neighborhood, up the hill. I carried the papers - when I carried that paper route from Slaters Lane down to the old brick factory, which is now part of the power plant, I'd go down the river to two little houseboats down there. Mr. Hottle had one and I can't remember who had the other one. Then Slater Lamond a big man who owned that property -he had the brick factory there and his house sat back off where Slaters Lane is. Where the Marina Tower Apartments are. I carried Slater Lamond and then I carried a black family and then there was Mr. Hottle. Came back up the hill on Bashford Lane and Maggie Bashford's House. She had a house on Bashford Lane up here. [Pointing to map.] That way. And they had apartments there and I delivered to apartments and then I came down Pitt Street, which was unpaved and wet water - they'd throw the dishwater out in the street. [There were] pigeons and guinea hens everywhere.
J.H.:	Was it muddy?!
John D. Pierpoint	You slid through there and came down behind my aunt's. A big pond there behind what was a Hot Shoppe at that time. A little further up from the Giant was a big deep hole in the ground - six, seven feet deep. And right behind the Hot Shoppe, we used to go there and catch little baby turtles. Me and a boy named Frankie Dixon. We called [them] skillpots. Little teeny turtles. Like that big.
J.H.:	What would do with them? Save them? Keep them as pets?
John D. Pierpoint	Save 'em. Keep 'em. Till my mother got tired of smelling them and then she made me get rid of them. Then there used to be the horse and buggy. We had to get by this big old horse. Mr. Pinkard had a drayage business and this big ole horse pulled a wagon all around town and he did odd jobs for people. Yea, you had to get by this big ole horse to get to Colonial Avenue where I lived. Where the fire department is near Mr. Donipain's house on Powhatan Street -- there's an open field there and anti-aircraft batteries [were] set up there during the war - had a big searchlight. Then they built houses in there. They had an ice company of course where they put in the freight cars off Henry Street. In the old days they didn't have refrigeration. So what would happen is people from the old country, locals, when they'd come in to town, they didn't have any training for any kind of job, they'd take jobs at Fruit Grower's Express, building cars for refrigeration - refrigeration cars - wooden cars.... Then they'd have a big channel down in there. A big hole. You'd

	shove ice in there. All the perishables went out here - Potomac Yards by North Henry Street. They come along by the ice house and they put these big 2-, 300- pounds blocks of ice in these cars. Really interesting. [There was] a nice fish pond out front and ice cold water to drink.
House Memories	
J.H.:	Do you remember what the inside of some of the first houses you lived in looked like?
John D. Pierpoint	They weren't much. A lot of them didn't have heating plants. A lot of them had these bulls-eyes woodwork. And when we had the house on Lee Street we had a little vacant space where the steps were built. They didn't bother hooking everything up. They just ran the steps up to the top platform. You had to jump across. About a twelve-inch gap. You had to climb up to get onto the flooring - for both the front bedroom and the back.
J.H.:	There were two stairwells?
John D. Pierpoint	There was only one stairwell. But when you went up, it was really weird. [Drawing]. When you went up the stairs, you get to the top steps there was an indent in there, about 18 inches. It didn't go all the way up. For some reason they didn't bring that step all the way up. So you had to step down to a hole-like and then climb up. Don't ask me what it was! My friends - the Whitstones - they lived in what's called a Flounder House - where it doesn't have any windows on one side. They're million dollar houses now. In those days, you couldn't give 'em away. I carried papers down the 100 block of Prince - cobblestones and all. The cobblestones came over as ballast on the early ships. It was spooky down in there. I didn't like it.
J.H.:	'Cause of the cobblestones?
John D. Pierpoint	No, 'cause of the old houses there. Old captain's row down in there. They'd been around a long time.
J.H.:	Were there rumors that they were haunted?
John D. Pierpoint	Possibly. A junk man had a building at the foot of Union and Prince Street - the cobblestone street. Right down at the end of the cobblestone street was this man. I can't remember his name. Sonny and I put magazines and cardboards in our newspapers to try to make 'em weigh a lot. He was pretty strict. Jewish fellow. He'd say, "You don't have anything in those papers [to make it heavy], do you?" and we'd say, "No sir." ...We were trying to get two cents more for the papers.
Childhood Games/Fun and Uncle's Store	
J.H.:	What other games did you and friends play when you were young?
John D. Pierpoint	Kick the can and shot baskets in Davis Yard. At home we played touch football in Black Dog Alley behind Whitstone's house with Frances, Spike, Ed and Sonny. Then at the 100 block of North Royal

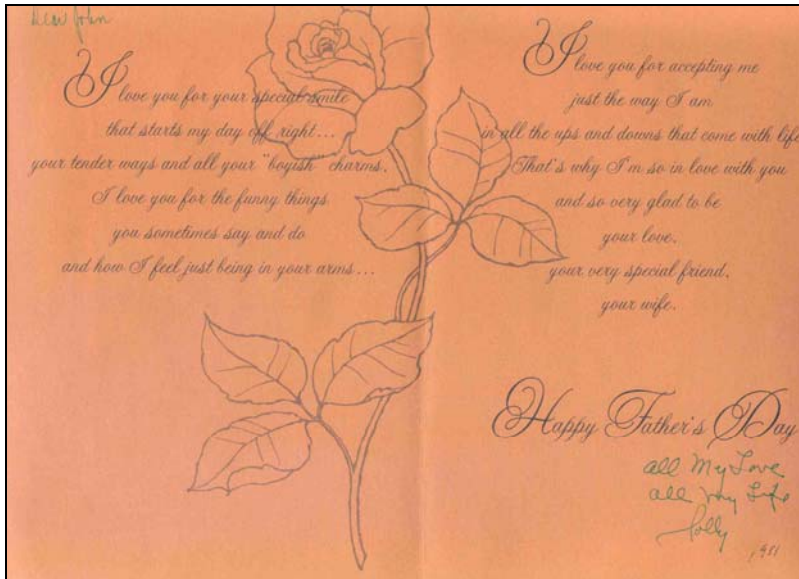
	Street, I learned how to shoot pool there. It was called 'Scotts.' Across the street was the Royal Café, which was there for probably 50 years before they moved up on St. Asaph's Street.
J.H.:	What did you eat when you went to the Royal Café?
John D. Pierpoint	I'm not sure about that. We used to get our cupcakes at Seftons right down here on the 100-block of Fairfax Street. Seftons had an ice cream store on Prince and Fairfax... My aunt had started a St. Joseph's Aid Society. Or she didn't start it, but St. Joseph's Catholic Church had a clothing store and my aunt had these clothes in her home - in the front of her building - 801 N. Washington Street, which is now a gas station. It's across from Little Tavern. Then my uncle Mack - he had a grocery store at West and Prince Street, which is now the homeless building - Christ House. [Side A ends.] [Begin Tape 1, Side B.] ...My aunt would operate the phones and my uncle Mack would cut the meat and everything right there in Christ House - (the homeless people's place). In those days people didn't have a lot of money so we had a little pad -- a little notebook like [indicates size/shape with hands] -- something like that. My aunt would put a dozen eggs, a pound of butter, flour, lard or whatever on this ticket and add it up -- probably come to 67 cents or something like that - I'd jump out of the truck and take the little package I had - Windsor Irby would do the driving and I'd deliver to the women - it was always women -- men were all working. And I'd say, "So and so, you owe 37 cents," and she'd say, "And you tell Dell I'll pay her tomorrow or next week," and that's the way we did it, see we did everything on credit. Ernie drove the truck later as Windsor went to work for AB&W.
Shopping and Church	
J.H.:	Do you remember what other stores you used to shop at?
John D. Pierpoint	Sanitary had a store at the corner of Royal and Prince. Later I guess they were called Safeway. Sunshine Market [was on] Columbus Street. Then the A&P was up on Duke Street where the Tabletalk is - a little restaurant now. A&P was right there. Friend of ours, Ms. Liz, got killed there -- lady who used to babysit us. [She] got hit by a truck or a bus right there on the corner. They used to have a car dealer - Herby's - across the street where all our people were - our friends were. Where Warwick Village now is, was all woods. My cousin - we used to leave church and she'd run through the woods [now Warwick Village]. She was so fast. But I was chicken. I wouldn't go through the woods. I'd go around by the road - Mt. Vernon Avenue. Commonwealth Avenue.
J.H.:	And then meet her on the other side?
John D. Pierpoint	Yea, and try to beat her out by - I'd go around by Flamingo Car Wash and turn around and go down the tracks

J.H.:	This is after church, you would do that?
John D. Pierpoint	Yea, she'd go through the woods. She was brave. She's tough. Her name is Joan Conlon. She has a lot of knowledge.... Well the trolley used to run out to Hume Springs. My mother used to ride it. Then she'd jump off the trolley - she was just a young girl in high-school - she'd run in the dark - no lights out there - one light by where the trolley pulled up to Hume Avenue - she'd get off at Hume Avenue by the - where there's a little bank there now I guess - just beyond it - and run all the way up to Glebe Road by way of Mt. Vernon Avenue - out where Calvert House is - Calvert House Apartments - run passed Calvert -which was nothing but woods there- and then down Glebe Road to Russell Road where she lived. I tell you, makes shivers run up your spine thinking about it today because the water used to run - dirt and mud used to run out on Commonwealth Avenue and Mt. Vernon Avenue right there off Hume Avenue where it drained out of the woods. There were two big posts there, old posts, that'd been up there for years and years - I'd tell you right now I wouldn't go in that woods, but this girl here, she'd run through 'em.
J.H.:	Did you ever ride the trolley?
John D. Pierpoint	No. My mother may have taken me on it, but most of the time she pushed me in a baby carriage from Glebe Road to 801 North Washington Street where my aunt lived. That's quite a push. They had a clinic - we didn't have a hospital. You only had the one - you had the Alexandria Hospital. So people in Del Ray used to go to the clinic. They had a clinic right there on the school ground where Mt. Vernon School is -where the north end of the school grounds. P.J. Jackson used to run it. Tall, thin woman, had on a white coat - I used to be scared to death of her. My mother said she had a heart good as gold - big as a basketball. She was really something. Ms. P. Jackson.
J.H.:	Do you remember having to take any medicines as a kid? What were the remedies when you were ill?
John D. Pierpoint	No. Most trouble we had was apple cider. We used to mix so many different kinds of apples... One day I was coming downhill on my wagon and passed the old icehouse, coming down Lee Street and saw this man fall over on this dock -Barnett's Dock - by the candy store. I guess he died, I don't know, but when I rode back up to tell my father, he said, AHe's all right- he just got sick - and they took him to the hospital.@ I don't think it was true... My other uncle - he was a brakeman on the trains.
J.H.:	Did you ever go down to the railroad yard to see him?
John D. Pierpoint	No. But [he] was a brakeman and every time I hopped a train, he'd tell Dad about it. So Dad asked me one time - I said, 'no.' I didn't. I

	told him a lie. I didn't want a sermon! ...My granddaddy was a Pennsylvania engineer on the railroad, Frank Beall. My dad and I picked him in Ivy City at Benning Road after a run. Grandma had a gold pass and when I got married in Cleveland she came to Cleveland on the train.
J.H.:	What's a gold pass?
John D. Pierpoint	Something to do where she can ride free. [Tape paused.]
J.H.:	You were going to tell me some stories when we were standing down there, looking down the stairwell. What stories did you want to tell me?
Torpedo Factory (2)	
John D. Pierpoint	There were a lot of women for the men to date! The men did a good job.
J.H.:	Were the woman mostly older than you?
John D. Pierpoint	They were all older.
J.H.:	Were you the only teenager there? [at the Torpedo Factory?]
John D. Pierpoint	No. Bobby Hatton was there. He was my age. We quit school the same week. He went on to be a machinist. He got through the apprenticeship and I didn't. I joined the Army. But Bobby he hung on to work in Silver Spring. He got a good job. He went on to be a daggone good machinist. But they sent me to Washington to the Navy Yard. Uncle Woody was in the gun factory over there. He did a heck of job. He didn't take no nonsense. He gave me his tool chest in hopes that I would be a machinist and I disappointed him [that] I didn't become a machinist. I didn't get through the apprenticeship. His name was Benjamin Wood. He later went on to be a specialist in [incomprehensible??] it was a wind-tunnel and what-not where they did mock-ups for bridges and what ships would take. First job he had was rough, dealing with the gun barrels and what not on the big battleships. ... [At the torpedo factory] what I wasn't supposed to do -- whenever they got a bunch of torpedoes to be tested, I'd skip out on work, right off the floor, and go out the back and watch them load the torpedoes on the barge.
J.H.:	Were you supposed to be skipping out on work?
John D. Pierpoint	No. I was supposed to be working.
J.H.:	How long were your shifts? You were just a kid at the time. Did they make you full eight hour [shifts]?
John D. Pierpoint	No. They didn't push me. They figured this kid ain't going to do no work anyway! First place, I didn't do anything. Machinist had to set my jobs up - these guys that were experts. Otherwise, I'd have drilled a hole 3-inches wide, so it's 4-inches wide! It was complicated. Blue-prints, I'd have to stand on my head to read some of them! I don't see how people can do blue-prints.

J.H.:	It's complicated.
John D. Pierpoint	My job got boring last two months I was at the Navy Yard. All I did was work a horizontal milling machine. Same job for rocket launchers. You'd take fifty of these aluminum things and spin them, cut so much off of them. With the chalk. Liquid to keep them cool. Then you'd flip 'em and put them in a bucket and then you'd count 'em. You had so many to do a day -- it was rather monotonous.
The Skating Rink	
J.H.:	Tell me more about the ice skating rink, when you used to go there.
John D. Pierpoint	I went to the roller-skating rink at Riverside. It was pretty nice. They had ushers that could really skate and they didn't take any nonsense. I had some tough guys I ran around with and skated well too. These ushers were all tall, thin, good-looking guys.
J.H.:	As were you!
John D. Pierpoint	No, I wasn't very big. But I could skate. Girls, of course, went for the taller guys. So many of them. They were outnumbered. So we only had three or four girls that we skated with.
J.H.:	Did you have your own skates?
John D. Pierpoint	No, we rented them. Because we didn't know when we'd be going there. Later on, there was a beer joint - Heurich Brewery across the street. We were able to get beer in the later days. But not then. I had my first beer - Wilson Liner, "Senate" - it was nasty.
J.H.:	Did they play music at the rinks?
John D. Pierpoint	Yea. [incomprehensible] A guy named Johnny Hartsfield. He was very talented. He played anything the girls asked him to play [at the Alexandria Rink].
J.H.:	Was this on records?
John D. Pierpoint	No. He played it. Actually played it. Played the organ. Now Riverside in Washington might have been different. But this boy played the organ there at Alexandria.
J.H.:	The organ was in the rink.
John D. Pierpoint	Across from where the Royal restaurant is-- North St. Asaph. Next block up on the east side is where the skating rink was.
J.H.:	Do you remember some of the songs that he would play?
John D. Pierpoint	The World is Waiting for the Sunrise. Peg of My Heart. Sentimental Journey.
The Prom and Wooing	
J.H.:	What did you wear to the prom?
John D. Pierpoint	Sportcoat. Nuns made 'em [girls] wear something [with a] blouse. No cleavage. Catholic highschool. No way. I couldn't believe it. Cos I'd never been to a Catholic [prom].
J.H.:	You'd gone to G[eorge] W[ashington] right?
John D. Pierpoint	Yea. This was St. Mary's Academy actually. I'm not sure that I went

	to the G.W. prom. I finished with a G.E.D. in the Army.
J.H.:	Did you give your date a corsage? Did you exchange corsages/bouquets?
John D. Pierpoint	Yes. [tells story on the side]



*Letter to John, with love from his wife, Polly, 1951
(courtesy J.D. Pierpoint)*

J.H.:	How much younger was your sister than you?
John D. Pierpoint	She was two years, but she got married a year before I did. Married a boy named Coleman - Eddie Coleman. He was an athlete. At Alexandria. They borrowed my car to go to Niagara Falls... [for] three days. I had to ride the bus! I think at the time I was dating Juanita too - the one who lost my bracelet.
J.H.:	So you made the bracelet here at the Torpedo Factory?
John D. Pierpoint	Yea. I made it here. It took me about three months.
J.H.:	While you were on the job?
John D. Pierpoint	On the job, right. Everybody did. The men did too. But see they were talented. I was slow because I had to go find out who to go to next and where you'd get this done.
J.H.:	Were these bracelets popular amongst Torpedo Factory workers to give to their girlfriends?
John D. Pierpoint	Well, the rings were more popular, to tell you the truth. You had what you'd call a Monelle. Very hard substance. Where they'd make a beautiful ring. Polish it up. Boy it was hot and hard to handle. I didn't try Monelle but once.
J.H.:	So you just made the dime...

John D. Pierpoint	...bracelet with the liberty dime heads in it and that was the start. Because some things I couldn't do. You had to go to different places in the shop to get it done. Like dipping it in acid before they put in the gold plating. You had to get your turn. Cos everybody wanted to do something.
J.H.:	Was she the only one you gave such a bracelet to?
John D. Pierpoint	Yea. She's the only one. Course gave my wife a nice ring and she gave me a nice watch. We were married in Cleveland in January of 1950 and the snow was a foot deep. And Rudy – her ex-boyfriend- flattened my tires -- in a foot of snow!
J.H.:	You said you met your wife here in Alexandria?
John D. Pierpoint	Yea. She and her friends were living on North Pitt Street in [what are now] \$300,000 third floor apartments on North Pitt. They were rentals. I think they were \$180/month probably... Five of 'em. Four of her girlfriends were living there from Pennsylvania. Melissa, Helen, JoAnn, cant think of the other one. But Helen did most of the cooking. But if anybody else did the cooking I wouldn't go up there, it'd smell so bad! Helen was a real good cook. When I met my wife, I was dating Janet Baginsky from Cleveland. One day I had a date with Janet and I went up to the lot, parking lot and blew the horn to...I didn't want to go up there.
J.H.:	To get her to come down?
John D. Pierpoint	To get her to come down. She was living on the fourth floor - I wasn't going up there--third floor, I think. I didn't want to go up there. Out came this little spitfire in shorts - and she said, "Don't you dare do that again. Don't you blow for my girlfriend. You go upstairs and get her like all sensible men would do." And I said, "Who are you?" She said, "I'm Polly. Don't you worry. I'm her girlfriend and I want you to do that." So then I was a little miffed. I went on the date with this other girl and then I dated this little girl here, Polly. Pauline. That's how I met her.
J.H.:	She won your heart!
John D. Pierpoint	Yes, she did. I said this little girl is something! Talkin' trash to me.
J.H.:	What was your first date with her?
John D. Pierpoint	I was dating Janet first. My brother Tommy was double-dating Polly. He married a nice girl from Tennessee. Yea, the first date I had with her –probably, Hot Shoppe. Movie and Hot Shoppe. Story of our life!
J.H.:	Movie and Hot Shoppe.
John D. Pierpoint	Movie and Hot Shoppe. Mighty Moe and a chocolate icecream cake.
J.H.:	What's a Mighty Moe? A burger?
John D. Pierpoint	It's like a hamburger but it has real good sauce on it.
J.H.:	Mighty Moe sauce?

John D. Pierpoint	Yea, it's like Y I'll tell you what it's equal to today. It's equal to Ruby Tuesdays [burger]. But not quite as big. Ruby Tuesdays is the biggest one I've ever seen. Then they had little chocolate and vanilla cake.
J.H.:	Like a marble cake?
John D. Pierpoint	Yea. It's really good. Wasn't too expensive either.
J.H.:	Sounds like a good deal.
John D. Pierpoint	Yea, Mighty Moe and a chocolate cake and a milkshake or two. Maybe a fight, or two. Depending on who you knew Y who you were with. Plus we all drove our cars around. We'd polish our cars up and everybody'd try to outdo one another.
Driving and D.C.	
J.H.:	What color was your car?
John D. Pierpoint	Blue. '48 Plymouth with dual exhaust and fender skirts. Police would ticket us for the loud exhaust. Everybody had the loud exhaust.
J.H.:	It was just too loud? How much did those tickets cost you?
John D. Pierpoint	Thirty-dollars a piece.
J.H.:	That's a lot.
John D. Pierpoint	I had airhorns under the hood. One time we're coming down Pennsylvania Avenue from Bob White's - been out drinking all night and the policeman was sleeping at an intersection back up in an alley-like. And this friend of mine, Norman Knipe, he reached over and touched the airhorn. Two o'clock in the morning. We did get a ticket. A Disturbing the peace," - I don't know what it was. That cost me about forty-dollars. That's a lot of money in those days. That's equal to about a hundred today. Yea, coming down Pennsylvania Avenue, Southwest - just the other side of the Capital Building.
J.H.:	It sounds like you had a great car.
John D. Pierpoint	It wasn't as fast as the others, but it was very good. And of course I dated seventeen girls in Alexandria. I got their names written down.
John D. Pierpoint	I had good control or thought I did. I had a few benders. They had a place on 9th Street B fixed it while you waited.
J.H.:	9th Street, [Washington], D.C.?
John D. Pierpoint	9th Street. 9th and D [streets]. Used to be a double-feature movies. Next to the burlesque theater. So we'd go either to the burlesque or to the movie. And they'd work on the car. Me and my buddies, we'd go into the double-feature and when we came out, the car was ready to go, right there on 9th Street. Just above D Street.
J.H.:	Did you spend a lot time in D.C. going out?
John D. Pierpoint	Well, we did. And we didn't. Every kid in D.C. would go to a hilltop or something in Georgetown and they'd kick your butt if they'd

catch ya over there. But we used to go there anywhere.

J.H.: Cos you were from Alexandria?



*J.D. and his car, 1948
(courtesy J.D. Pierpoint)*

John D. Pierpoint Yea. Cos we were from another group. They were mostly motorcycle guys. They didn't kick my butt, but they came pretty close. Washington was the same way. If you could cross a bridge in Arlington, you better know whatchya doin' - you better be with somebody.

J.H.: Did you guys wear your high-school jackets? Is that how people could tell [you were from another school?]

John D. Pierpoint They wore 'em. Some of the guys wore 'em, but not very many. We sortta stayed casual dress. My friend Dick, on G.W. football team -- was the first at G.W. to dye his hair [with peroxide]. ... We rented boats there at Fletcher's -- right by Georgetown University.

J.H.: Near the canal?

John D. Pierpoint Near the canal, right. Where do you live?

J.H.: I live in D.C.

John D. Pierpoint Do you? Funny story about D.C. We used to go to northeast Washington, right by the Hechingers. We used to always go to the Crystal Inn...Crystal Restaurant or something. Anyway, one day I went in there and had this girl with me and we went into it and sat down and I thought there were a lot of black people in it, but I

wasn't sure. And so this guy came up to me and said, "You been in here lately?" and I said, "No." And he said, "Things have changed." And I said, "I see they have. We're just getting ready to leave." It changed on us. The girl I was dating, Eleanor, lived on Glebe Road. [tape ends].



*J.D.'s wife, Polly, and children, 1958 at Bucknell Manor, Alexandria
(courtesy J.D. Pierpoint)*