

# VILLAGES OF KENSINGTON ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

By Tarini Tippa and Jeff Steger

During the pandemic, the Villages of Kensington (VoK) created an intergenerational program to connect Montgomery County public school students with VoK members to participate in an oral history project. Student volunteers interviewed VoK members and wrote about the VoK member's personal history. This program will have lasting outcomes even after the pandemic wanes.

Tarini Tippa, a 9th grader at Richard Montgomery High School who participated in the project said, "one thing I enjoyed about the oral history project was having the opportunity to learn about the stories of other people and the lessons they can pass on along the way." Tarini interviewed VoK member Suzanne Bowler and then wrote this story.

Suzanne Bowler comes across as a warm and kindhearted person. She loves talking about all her life experiences and puts a great deal of thought into every word. Suzanne grew up in a small village in East Sussex, England with her mother and sister after World War II. Although she does not remember much about her childhood, some of her most prominent memories are of enjoying time at the seaside as a kid and eating Cadbury chocolate biscuits at teatime. Her first job after college was as a secretary at Wilkinson Sword, Ltd., a company located in South East London. Next,

Suzanne moved to Paris to work at NATO. In later years, she provided technical assistance and conducted research and evaluation of federally funded public health programs for minority and other populations at risk of substance abuse addiction and other health problems in Washington, D.C.

Suzanne loves to travel and has visited many European countries including Austria, Germany, Greece, Spain, Turkey, and Italy. She considers her Italian ceramics a notable souvenir. Of all the places where she has lived, Suzanne describes the San Francisco Bay Area as her favorite. It was while she was living in France that some American friends encouraged her and another close friend to visit the Bay Area. Suzanne and her friend both ended up staying in the United States.

Suzanne obtained a PhD in Medical Anthropology at the University of California, Berkeley in the late 1980s and then moved to Washington, D.C. where she conducted her dissertation research. Suzanne describes her university years as one of the most interesting and influential experiences of her life, in particular studying with two brilliant female professors.

Currently, Suzanne lives with her poodle, Coco Chanel. She enjoys walking her dog, cooking - especially making dinner for friends, spending time with friends, going to the theatre and concerts, watching programs on public television, and learning languages. She is in the process of learning Italian and already speaks several other languages.

When asked to describe herself in three words, Suzanne says she is funny, talkative, and useful. Her favorite memories are the years that she spent with her two late husbands and her friends as well as taking trips to the beach. Her advice for the younger generation is to travel to other countries, meet and learn about the people—their languages and cultures, and appreciate similarities and differences between them and us. Next up, Suzanne looks forward to traveling with a friend to Rehoboth Beach, Delaware, and visiting old friends in the San Francisco Bay Area and Sonoma, Arizona.

Villages of Kensington (VoK) was founded in 2015 by Kensington residents Donna Savage (a resident of Kensington Heights) and Suzanne Bowler (a resident of Rock Creek Hills). Savage and Bowler met in 2014 at an event sponsored by the Silver Spring Village. Savage was inspired by Silver Spring Village's program of "supporting seniors to stay in their homes by using volunteers," and the Village concept was remarkably interesting to her. "It is the neighborly thing to do," said Savage. "Giving rides, taking garbage to the curb...these actions already were happening, so we decided to organize around the concept of neighbors helping neighbors." Savage became VoK's first president and served in that post until September 2019. Bowler served as VoK's vice president for several years.



**Villages of Kensington**

**"Living Well & Aging Better"**  
**in the Kensington Community**

The Mission of the Villages of Kensington is to build a supportive, diverse, intergenerational network of neighbors helping neighbors to remain in their homes and stay engaged in their community.

**Visit our website for more information:**  
**[VillagesofKensingtonMD.org](http://VillagesofKensingtonMD.org)**