

ORAL HISTORY RELEASE FORM

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Signature of Interviewee: *Jacquelyn N. Reid*

Name: *JACQUELYN N. REID*

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Name of Interviewer: *Amy Rivenburg
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Special Restrictions:

ORAL HISTORY DATA SHEET (to be turned in with tapes & transcript)

INTERVIEWEE: *Jacquelyn Reid*

ADDRESS: *P O Box 738, Farmville VA 23901*

DATE OF INTERVIEW: *3/22/00*

PLACE OF INTERVIEW: *Bland Reid Funeral Home*

INTERVIEWER/S: *Amy Rivenburg and Heather Willis*

TOPICS COVERED:

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(1)

Amy Rivenburg and Heather Willis
Oral History of Jackie Reid

My name is Jaqueline Reid, I am a native of Farmville. By profession I am a funeral director and embalmer. I am a 1971 graduate of Prince Edward County High School, graduate of Eastern Southern State University and of John Tyler Community College.

1.) How old were you when the schools closed?

I was 6, ready to start school.

2.) So what did you do when the schools closed?

When the schools closed I lived with my grandparents in Buckingham County and attended school there. I went, well, I came home on the weekends and my parents would drop me off on Sundays and pick me up on Fridays. First through third grade.

3.) What about other people that you knew that were affected by it?

Um. I had friends who, one of my best friends moved to Baltimore. Then I had friends who stayed here in Farmville and didn't go to school. They, they would maybe go to the church schools that were set up for tutoring and things like that.

4.) How would you say that the school closing affected your childhood?

I guess basically because I was so young, there was a separation from my parents but because I basically was with my maternal grandparents and I, I had aunts the same age, well not the same age, but I had an aunt that was two years older and we were real close so it, it, I, I wasn't as affected as others. I got to see my parents every, every weekend and sometimes during the week and I didn't miss anytime in school so I basically wasn't that affected.

5.) So you went back to Prince Edward for 4th grade?

Yes in, I think it was, 1963 when they had the free schools. I came back to Prince Edward and we were, we were lumped by age group. I went to free schools in '63. They grouped us by age and I was in a 9 year old class. I stayed there, well during that year, I guess you worked at your, worked at your own pace and midyear like, January or February, they moved me out of the 9 year old group to a 10 year old group and at the end of the free schools I moved from the 9 year old group directly into the sixth grade. So I actually did two years that particular year so it was, it was a plus for me and that I was able to skip a grade.

- 6.) When you did return to Prince Edward County Schools was there a big age variance in your classes?

Oh yeah, well not, not during the free schools because we were lumped by age, and then the next year when the schools formally opened, there was a variance of ages. You had kids who might have been, well at that time I was nine, no I was ten, and I might have had kids that were 12, 13 in my class.

- 7.) So nobody that was a lot older?

Well it would be, there wouldn't have been more than 3 or 4 years max because I was just starting so anybody that was going to the 6th grade when they closed would have only been maybe 3 or 4 years older.

- 8.) How did the school closing make you feel about the community?

Well being so young, it was just something that you accepted, you know, what could you do about it? I guess had I been older, I probably would have been a lot more upset or mentally affected a lot more. I mean there were kids who didn't go to school at all. So I'm sure they were negatively affected.

- 9.) Did you notice any changes within the black community?

Well, I mean, other than a lot of people moved, well not a lot but people moved. Friends moved away, some of them never returned or they shipped their kids to relatives and things like that. So your neighborhood was just kinda disrupted, you know. People that you played with were gone and where I lived, across the street from where my mother's beauty parlor is and there were kids on this block right where the new dorm is, Arc, and there were houses all the way around the block with kids there and kids all the way up Race Street where the Library and Music building and Art building. There might have been 30, 40 kids in the neighborhood and during those times we used to just play out on the street and everything and you know, but when the schools closed a lot of those kids disappeared.

- 10.) Did you have any siblings that were affected?

No, at that time I was an only child. My younger sister is 6 years younger so she was born in 1960 so it didn't affect her at all.

- 11.) Did you and your family ever talk about what was going on?

I knew what was going on, I mean, I knew that the schools were closed, I knew why the schools were closed. I knew that the whites didn't want to go to school with blacks. I did not know that much about, like the different cases that were on file. I believe that I was like one of the people in one of the suits, but I didn't

know about that then. My father and Rev. Griffin were very close and so I was included in, I think the class, the class, I don't know if it was a class action or what kind of suit it was, but I haven't looked. I know I'm named in one of them and at time, you know, it doesn't register- when you're 6,7,8 years old, it just goes above you.

12.)Did you play a role in the court proceedings?

No.

13.)No? Your name was just mentioned?

Yes.

14.)How did you view Rev. Griffin?

That was my buddy. I mean, he was like a second father. I mean, his youngest daughter and I grew up together, we're still friends and he was just like you know, a second father. He spent as much time at my house and here at the funeral home as my dad. I mean, he was just there all the time. You know he was a good man.

15.)So you were close to his children?

Yeah.

16.)Did notice a change within them?

Well you see, they left and they were not here the whole time. I'm trying to think, where did they go? I know the Whites went to Baltimore and some went to Cumberland.-mumbling- I can't remember where they were but we were, we were friends, I mean, you know Rev. Griffin was here the whole time. Where the kids were, I'm not sure.

17.)Did your father's relationship with Rev. Griffin remain the same throughout?

Oh yea, Rev. Griffin was probably one of my dad's best friends. They hunted together, they used to just ride together when Rev. Griffin had to speak or go out of town sometimes, my dad would ride with him. My dad laughs because he and Rev. Griffin took Vernon Johns down to North Carolina for something and you know, they just talk about the good old days and stuff like that. But they, they were, I think he was closer to Rev. Griffin than he was to some of his real brothers. They were just that close.

18.)Did you know Vernon Johns?

I don't remember him.

19.) So after you went to college, where did you go?

I came back here, taught a year, and decided teaching wasn't my forte. Then I left here, I moved to Northern Virginia and I went back to school. I started school at George Mason, took some business courses. I was a music major and I decided I did not want to teach music, did not want to teach, so when I went to George Mason I decided to take some business courses/accounting courses and I worked for Woodward and Lothrop for a year and I was able to get in the federal government and I worked at the National Medical Center in Bethesda for a couple of months and well, longer than that probably about nine months. Then I moved to the general accounting office where I stayed for 14 years.

20.) And then you moved back here?

Yes.

21.) What made you move back?

Well several things, my parents were getting older, my dad, was getting older and you know he has a business here and he needed help. I got tired of living in the city and the Washington area, even though I did not live in Washington, I worked in Washington and it had gotten so bad, crime wise, that I just, you know got tired of looking over my shoulder, you know. I had a son, I'm a single parent and I have a son and I would drop him off at school or day care and we'd say goodbye, and I say, hmmm, I wonder if I'm going to make it back to see him, that kind of thing and with him being a black male, I figured his chances of making it to adulthood are much better here than in the D.C. area. So those were major factors in coming back.

22.) How do you feel about Farmville now? Do you think that it has changed any?

It's, it's changed a lot, it still has a very long ways to go. The rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer- that's everywhere. I still believe that there is a split society here. It's not addressed, it just kinda goes on, you know. It's very divided-there are, there are people who cross back and forth, but generally, you know, it's a split community. I am pleased with the progress the school system has made, however, within the past couple years, I've been disappointed with some of the changes that have been made. And I just hope that it's not a downward spiral.

23.) You think they are starting to regress?

Yeah, I do. I think the focus has changed dramatically, especially since, Dr. Anderson left and Dr. Blackman came aboard. There's, I don't know, I just see a lot of changes- not, well the emphasis has changed, you know, and you have a lot

of disgruntled personnel, that I don't want to say disgruntled, but you know, they've worked in the system for a long time and they've invested a lot of interest in the system and they see changes going on and they just kind of stand by helpless and they can't- they are not in a position- to make a change or to affect the change so why get discouraged and a lot of our really good teachers are either leaving or opting to retire, where they probably would have taught maybe another 5 or 6 years. They're just retiring.

24.)Did you ever experience any racism while you were growing up?

Sure I did.

25.)Do you think it was worse here than it would have been anywhere else?

It depends on where you go and on the circumstances. Growing up here, it was just an accepted fact that, you did not walk, you know where the Art Center is down on Main Street? That was the location of J.J. Newberry's, which is like a department store, like Woolworths or whatever. And they had a food counter, candy counter and stuff like that. Well it was an accepted, you did not sit at the counter, you know, you had to wait until basically you just waited until they got around to you. Regardless of when you came in, as far as who arrived first and to that, that still happens sometimes but see now as an adult, I will let it be known- I was here first. Adults and children alike knew that, that was just an accepted practice, you could not do anything about it so you dealt with it and until this happened to you over and over and over again, it becomes demeaning-it makes you feel bad, very powerless to do anything, you don't like it and you can't do anything about it so yea that's the form of racism that people dealt with.

26.)Did you have any white friends?

Not until I went to Longwood, I went to Longwood for a year. Basically the community was very separated there were a few whites in the public school system then. I wasn't particularly close to anybody, I knew them by name, we were in the band together or took classes together. We had maybe 2 whites in our senior class and that was it. But then when I went to Longwood, it was like culture shock and I developed friendships with some people who were really nice. I learned a lot, you know. I learned a lot.

27.)There weren't that many white students at Prince Edward?

No, probably 2 or 3 families. Everybody else went to the Academy/

28.)How do you think your life would have been different if the schools hadn't closed?

I don't know if it would have made that much of a difference, personally, because, I was able to go to school. Personally, it probably wouldn't have made

that much of a difference. The only thing that I probably would have missed would have been the people I know, met in Buckingham that I fostered friendships with, that I am still friends with now. I come in contact with them when we bury members of their family and things like that, so it's like even though I didn't graduate there, I go to class reunions and things like that. I made friends that I probably never would have known.

29.) Was Buckingham a lot different from Prince Edward?

Well at the time Buckingham, I mean everybody- it was basically segregated at that time. I don't know why- I wasn't exactly sure how Buckingham got around it but the schools were still all black. So I don't know what allowed Buckingham to continue and Prince Edward not.

30.) In the textbook we have it talks about how the white community made it really hard for people in the black community that had to pay bills, especially for Rev. Griffin. Did that happen to your family?

No, my father is, he's sort of a self-made person, in that he, he worked for the gentleman who owned the funeral home before he died, but the funeral home burned down, so he had to rebuild. This was back in the early 50s and we catered predominantly black clientele so he still maintained his business. He really didn't have to rely on the white community here that much. Rev. Griffin-church wasn't paying him that much so my dad helped him out a lot, but I don't think they were given any credit or anything like that.

31.) Is there anything in particular that stands out in your mind today, that happened during those years?

I remember right after they announced the school opening and that they were opening the Academy and I remember there being some midnight meeting or something with the white parents- that the newspaper caught them lined up at the bank or something.

32.) Were they giving out money?

Yea, for Prince Edward Academy and I remember that being in the news.

33.) Anything you would like to add?

I hope it never happens again.

34.) Do you think that you've come to closure with what happened or did you find that you had to go through a healing process?

No, I don't really feel like I went through a healing process, basically because I love my grandparents, I was happy and I enjoyed being there, but I guess, the healing, as an adult, to look back and think-whites could have been so cruel-so ignorant, so self-serving, that they would have denied children the right to an education because of some foolishness. It hurts as a human being, I wasn't that affected just the fact that it was done, it is really disturbing that it could happen right here at home.

35.)Do you notice any older people in the community that are bitter about what happened?

Oh sure. I mean it comes out from time to time. It comes out and there were people who were affected a lot more especially the older kids who were in 10th, 11th grade, that was it for them. They couldn't go away, a lot of them got married and moved away and they didn't graduate or maybe they had to go back later and get their GED and you know, you stop and think how different their lives would have been. A lot of kids possibly could have gone to college and done things, but because they had nowhere to go, they couldn't move, so they couldn't finish school. I know people like that it's just a pill to accept, that people could be so cruel and just do that.

36.)Do you think it had an affect on the economic status of the black community as a whole? Do you think the black community would have prospered more if this hadn't happened?

Well, yea possibly. I think, had the community not been split like it was more blacks probably would have stayed and built their own business or done more around here in the community.

37.)How did you feel towards the Academy kids?

Well see I didn't know them, there's always the animosity between R.R. Moton and the Academy and we didn't associate it was just two different systems. Now it's even though they have changed the name to Fuqua and there are black students there, I think a lot of people in the black community still see it as a segregated system, in that you have the die hards who just don't want to bridge the gap and that the blacks that are there are only there for tax purposes. Somehow they have been brainwashed to believe they are getting a better education than they could get in the public schools. Just because I think they can be whatever the community makes and they could be so much better if everybody in the community supported them like they should and you have a lot of people with funds here in the county who could make a big difference in the school system and I think a lot of the companies here donate to the public school system but do it for business purposes not because their heart is in it. They are graduates of the Academy, their heart is still on the hill, it's always going to be there- the division is always going to be there.

*Imy Rventburg
Heather Willis*