

00;00;01;09 - 00;00;13;23

Tonia Merideth

Good morning. Thank you for joining us for an oral history interview at the Campbell County Training School Complex. My name is Tonia Merideth, the oral historian. Could you please state your name and today's date for the record.

00;00;13;26 - 00;00;18;28

Frank James

Frank James - December 19th, 2023.

00;00;19;00 - 00;00;28;08

Tonia Merideth

Thank you. Could you please tell us about your family, your parents, any siblings, where you were born and grew up?

00;00;28;10 - 00;01;04;02

Frank James

Okay. My parents' names were Cleveland James and Virginia James. I grew up right here in Rustburg, maybe three miles east of here and come from a large family. Five boys and seven girls, - one set of twin boys and a set of twin girls.

00;01;04;05 - 00;01;09;19

Tonia Merideth

Can you tell us a little bit about what family life was like

00;01;09;21 - 00;01;25;28

Frank James

Growing up we had to be - with it being so many - we had to help each other with the chores, babysitting, changing diapers.

00;01;26;00 - 00;01;38;09

Frank James

It was busy. It was free time, but most of the time it was family time together.

00;01;38;11 - 00;01;40;25

Frank James

It was enjoyable.

00;01;40;28 - 00;01;45;16

Tonia Merideth

So what year did you attend the Campbell County Training School?

00;01;45;18 - 00;01;50;16

Frank James

I started in 1952.

00;01;50;18 - 00;01;59;26

Tonia Merideth

And can you tell me, what do you remember about the teachers or teacher that taught you at the school?

00;01;59;28 - 00;02;35;10

Frank James

It seemed like they went out of their way to make sure that you learned what they were trying to teach you. And it was like you were part of their family. It was more like a family atmosphere. So, you know, if you had questions, you asked them, they would go out of their way to answer you and make it clear as possible where you would understand it.

00;02;35;13 - 00;02;40;18

Tonia Merideth

Any teacher in particular that stands out to you in your memory?

00;02;40;20 - 00;02;57;28

Frank James

I would say Mrs. Brown in the first grade. She was my first-grade teacher and she was short-statured. But you couldn't get away with anything.

00;02;58;01 - 00;03;08;00

Tonia Merideth

That was my next question. How was discipline handled in the school if you didn't turn in your assignments, if you were cutting up during class? How was discipline handled?

00;03;08;03 - 00;03;29;14

Frank James

Well, if you didn't finish your homework or assignments, and get them turned in on time, when everybody else went out for a recess, you stayed back in the room and you finished it no matter what. You would go finish your assignment and get it turned in.

00;03;29;17 - 00;03;33;16

Tonia Merideth

So can you tell us what a typical class day was like?

00;03;33;19 - 00;04;10;05

Frank James

Well, when we first got to class, the very first thing was they would take roll and then they would do the lunch count. And after that it was the Pledge of Allegiance. That was every single day. And then in the first grade, we did our ABC's, reading classes.

00;04;10;07 - 00;04;15;22

Tonia Merideth

Okay. And was lunch provided at the school? Or did you bring your own lunch?

00;04;15;24 - 00;04;31;26

Frank James

Mainly, everybody brought their own lunch. But then the cafeteria staff they had hot lunches, but it was limited.

00;04;31;29 - 00;04;43;04

Tonia Merideth

Can you tell me what you remember about the materials that you used, the books that you used in your classroom, and what condition the books were?

00;04;43;07 - 00;05;13;06

Frank James

What the books were? They stayed with the classroom and let me see, what was it - We Come and Go, Dick and Jane, the primer books. Some of them were in pretty bad shape, but that was all we had at the time.

00;05;13;08 - 00;05;20;00

Tonia Merideth

Did you take field trips or do any other activities at the school or school carnivals?

00;05;20;02 - 00;05;44;04

Frank James

No, we didn't do field trips, but in May we had the May exercise that was - each class had a little program that they did, wrap the maypole, races.

00;05;45;00 - 00;05;50;06

Tonia Merideth

Can you tell us what the bathroom facilities were like at the school?

00;05;50;08 - 00;06;32;28

Frank James

Back then, we had either a three-holer or a four-holer outside bathroom, and instead of a urinal, it was a homemade urinal. It was dig a pit and, you know, it was enclosed. Even when it was raining, you know, every so often we would have a break or before assembly, they let us go to the bathroom.

00;06;32;28 - 00;06;45;13

Frank James

And once we get to the door, it's who can get there first. It was like a footrace.

00;06;45;16 - 00;06;58;27

Tonia Merideth

Thank you. So for the school, were there any activities or responsibilities that the boys were required to do that you recall?

00;06;58;29 - 00;07;53;13

Frank James

Yes. The custodians used to come in in the morning in the wintertime and start the hot fire and the potbelly stoves. And after the class, after we got here, then we had to get the coal and keep the fire going all day, you know, for heat. It wasn't central air or that. And the girls, they'd mainly clean the blackboards and either they would take the erasers outside and you know, de-chalk them or the boys would also do that.

00;07;53;15 - 00;08;01;08

Tonia Merideth

Okay. So what was the academic year for the school?

00;08;01;11 - 00;08;07;05

Frank James

September. Yeah. We started in September.

00;08;07;07 - 00;08;11;16

Tonia Merideth

And then you would get out in?

00;08;11;18 - 00;08;42;07

Frank James

It was the first part of June. It was a lot of people that was, you know, working there. Their parents were working in tobacco and stuff like that. So they get out of school. They used to let us out so we could, you know, help with the planting.

00;08;42;10 - 00;08;45;20

Tonia Merideth

And how did you get to school? Did you walk or take a bus?

00;08;45;22 - 00;08;47;14

Frank James

Took a bus.

00;08;47;16 - 00;08;50;02

Tonia Merideth

Do you remember your bus driver?

00;08;50;04 - 00;08;58;03

Frank James

Yes, It was Mr. Gibson. He used to live in Concord.

00;08;58;05 - 00;09;01;21

Tonia Merideth

How long of a of a bus ride was that?

00;09;01;23 - 00;09;25;01

Frank James

Maybe 2 minutes. But after we moved down to by New Free Spring Baptist Church, that ride was close to 20 minutes.

00;09;25;03 - 00;09;43;11

Tonia Merideth

Are there any experiences or memories that you have related to going to school? Black children going to one school and white children or the differences. Did you notice the differences at your school and learn about the way things were in the white schools?

00;09;43;13 - 00;10;38;04

Frank James

Yes. When we went to - when we were here for PTA, the atmosphere was - it was good. But they were trying to get new materials, you know, books, refurbish the classrooms. And, you know, we knew the difference between our material and what the white kids had.

00;10;38;04 - 00;10;47;27

Frank James

And we knew we were lower on the totem pole.

00;10;47;29 - 00;11;04;09

Tonia Merideth

Do you remember any experiences - because the nation at that time was pushing for integration? Do you remember incidents of protests at that time going on to integrate the schools?

00;11;05;10 - 00;11;28;20

Frank James

Not really, but it was, you know, at church. They were trying to get a protest set up, but it didn't materialize.

00;11;28;22 - 00;11;35;13

Tonia Merideth

Do you remember your parents enforcing the importance of education?

00;11;35;15 - 00;12;06;20

Frank James

Yes. Once we got home from school, we had, I think it was like a 10 or 15 minute break for a snack. And then after that, it was homework and it had to get done before you could do anything else. And then you get started on your chores. But education was - it was at the top of the list. We had to have it.

00;12;06;22 - 00;12;17;22

Tonia Merideth

So what do you think of the efforts now, the efforts to collect the memories and legacies of the students who attended the Rosenwald Washington schools?

00;12;17;25 - 00;12;46;17

Frank James

I think it's an outstanding idea because we can, if we get everything set up, people can come in and see what it was like back then and can compare it to what it was then to what it is today and see the difference and how far everything has come.

00;12;46;19 - 00;12;50;08

Tonia Merideth

Why do you think that that's important for our young people to know now?

00;12;51;15 - 00;13;11;17

Frank James

I think it's important because it will let the young people today see what happened in the past and the way things are now and that way they won't take everything for granted.

00;13;11;20 - 00;13;17;16



Tonia Merideth

Did you attend a local church in the community? What was the church that your family attended?

00;13;17;16 - 00;13;23;09

Frank James

New Free Spring Baptist Church about 20 minutes east of here.

00;13;23;11 - 00;13;31;07

Tonia Merideth

And do you feel like there was a support from the church in educating the Black youth in the community?

00;13;31;10 - 00;14;01;26

Frank James

Yes. When we went to Sunday school, the teachers and the pastor gathered the children and talked to them. They talked to us about education and how far it can take you if you've got a good work in education.

00;14;01;29 - 00;14;16;10

Tonia Merideth

Is there anything you would like to add to the interview that I have not asked you. Any memories or anything else that stands out to you that you remember when you were attending the school?

00;14;16;12 - 00;15;02;11

Frank James

I'd just like to say my teachers, while I was here, they were like family. They look like they went out of their way to help you achieve. Yep. My teachers. I really appreciate all of the effort and diligence that they used to make sure that we got a quality education. Even though it was, it was some rough patches in there.

00;15;02;11 - 00;15;13;12

Frank James

But they just - they continued to work with us and helped us to survive.

00;15;13;14 - 00;15;19;26

Tonia Merideth

When you say rough patches, what were rough patches?

00;15;19;28 - 00;15;57;11

Frank James

Sometimes, you know, you had assignments that you really didn't want to finish, but they convinced you, you have to finish it and achieve the outcome because later on in life, it's going to be some things that you can't just pass off and let it go.

00;15;57;13 - 00;16;00;17

Tonia Merideth

Do you remember your principal from the school?

00;16;00;20 - 00;16;02;01

Frank James

Yes.

00;16;02;04 - 00;16;06;22

Tonia Merideth

What was he like?

00;16;06;25 - 00;16;21;02

Frank James

Stern. I mean, it was, if you had to go to the office, you didn't want to go but one time.

00;16;21;05 - 00;16;24;11

Tonia Merideth

Did you think that that worked, though?

00;16;24;13 - 00;16;29;01

Frank James

I know it worked. Yes.

00;16;29;03 - 00;16;31;03

Tonia Merideth

I'm sorry. What was his name? Do you remember?

00;16;31;06 - 00;16;32;14

Frank James

Mr. Jones?

00;16;32;14 - 00;16;33;29

Tonia Merideth

Mr. Jones.

00;16;34;01 - 00;16;36;18

Tonia Merideth

Thank you so much for joining us for an oral history interview.