

00:00:01:09 - 00:00:13:17

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. For the record, could you please state your full name.

00:00:13:19 - 00:00:16:15

Geraldine Pettigrew

Geraldine Gaines Pettigrew.

00:00:16:18 - 00:00:25:19

Tonia Merideth

Thank you. Miss Geraldine, could you please tell us about your family, your parents?

00:00:25:21 - 00:00:45:22

Geraldine Pettigrew

I was born in Campbell County, to Annie Mason and Irving Gaines. I have two sisters. I'm the oldest. And I have one deceased next to me and then one my, baby sister is still living.

00:00:45:24 - 00:00:51:14

Tonia Merideth

So can you tell me any fond memories you have about your childhood?

00:00:51:16 - 00:01:11:10

Geraldine Pettigrew

Yes. Where we lived, we'd walk to school, walked to Megginson school. We walked there. And whenever we had any plays or anything important, we always went down to the church in the community, And that's where we had our plays.and whatnot.

00:01:11:12 - 00:01:21:15

Tonia Merideth

What time did a typical school day start and what time did it end?

00:01:21:17 - 00:01:26:29

Geraldine Pettigrew

I'm thinking it started at nine and ended at 3 o'clock.

00:01:27:02 - 00:01:35:07

Tonia Merideth

Can you tell me what - who your teachers were? Do you remember any of your teachers? If we had more than one.

00:01:35:10 - 00:01:58:11

Geraldine Pettigrew

Yes. One of the teachers was Miss Jones, and there was a Mister Hemmings .And there was a Laurence Spencer. And Miss Fennell was them our supervisor for the county.

00:01:58:13 - 00:02:08:07

Tonia Merideth

Okay. Can you tell me what a typical day was like at school? From the time you guys came in until you left? What was a typical day like?

00:02:08:10 - 00:02:46:24

Geraldine Pettigrew

We had devotions in the morning and which always ended with prayer. And then we went to our classes, and then there was a ten o'clock, I think at ten o'clock, a morning recess. And then we had lunch. And about at 2 o'clock, we had another recess and it – school was open and all our bathroom facilities were outdoors. We didn't have any indoor plumbing and we had a potbellied stove and then we had wood and we had coal.

00:02:46:26 - 00:03:06:08

Geraldine Pettigrew

The county supplied the coal, whanot. And we didn't have any water. At first they went down to a neighbor's spring to get the water and then later they drilled us a well. Of course you had to pump the water from the well.

00:03:06:11 - 00:03:10:27

Tonia Merideth

And what about lunch? How was - how were your meals provided for in lunchtime?

00:03:10:29 - 00:03:24:25

Geraldine Pettigrew

Well, we brought our lunch from home and then later they had a - what we called the home economics room. And then we had a cook that would come in there and what not.

00:03:24:27 - 00:03:28:18

Tonia Merideth

To cook your meals for you for or prepare the meals for you for lunchtime?

00:03:28:21 - 00:03:31:07

Geraldine Pettigrew

Yes, for the ones that needed it.

00:03:31:09 - 00:03:38:27

Tonia Merideth

What were the typical subjects that were taught?

00:03:38:29 - 00:04:12:14

Geraldine Pettigrew

Well, in the first grade, we had reading and writing in the first grade classes. And then we had English and geography. This was the first three grades. They were in a small - in a lower classroom. In the next classroom, we had history and English. And we had geography. And we did a lot of reading.

00:04:12:16 - 00:04:25:02

Tonia Merideth

Do you remember the books that you used? Do you remember the condition of the books or can you describe the books and materials that were used in them in the school?

00:04:25:05 - 00:04:52:06

Geraldine Pettigrew

Well, we had in the beginning, we had the Mary Jane in the primary room. And then later we had Around the World geography. Then later, when we got in the other classroom, we had started some history and English, you know,

00:04:52:08 - 00:05:01:26

Tonia Merideth

Did you do any other types of activities, school carnivals or field trips when you went to...

00:05:01:28 - 00:05:29:10

Geraldine Pettigrew

We had - the girls did embroidery work. I forgot what the boys did. But, each year we came down here for the exhibit and anything that we had made, we brought down here, and put - I think it might have been in this room for exhibit, for others to see in the room.

00:05:29:10 - 00:05:37:14

Geraldine Pettigrew

And all they were awarded ribbons, blue ribbons and, you know, ribbons, according to your work.

00:05:53:19 - 00:05:58:17

Tonia Merideth

And did your school have a library?

Geraldine Pettigrew

It didn't have a – the Megginson school? - we didn't have a library, we had a library case that had books.

Tonia Merideth

And you said, you mentioned in the mornings that you did devotions.

00:05:58:21 - 00:05:59:16

Geraldine Pettigrew

Yes.

00:05:59:19 - 00:06:02:10

Tonia Merideth

And was that reading and writing? What was the devotion?

00:06:02:14 - 00:06:03:13

Geraldine Pettigrew

It was Bible verses.

00:06:03:16 - 00:06:04:13

Tonia Merideth

Bible verses?

00:06:04:13 - 00:06:08:18

Geraldine Pettigrew

In particular on Friday. Everybody had to say a Bible verse.

00:06:08:21 - 00:06:12:25

Tonia Merideth

I'm sorry. Can you repeat that? Everyone had to?

00:06:12:27 - 00:06:23:19

Geraldine Pettigrew

Say a bible verse. A verse from the Bible - quite often they were the same ones, but.

00:06:23:21 - 00:06:29:02

Tonia Merideth

In the beginning you mentioned how you got to school?

00:06:29:05 - 00:06:29:27

Geraldine Pettigrew

We walked.

Tonia Merideth

Walked. Okay. Do you remember any of the children that came on buses?

Geraldine Pettigrew

No, not at elementary school. All the children walked. If they didn't walk, there was some that rode with the teacher. They lived up on the highway and they rode with the teacher, a couple of 'em. But the others, everybody walked to school.

00:06:52:20 - 00:06:58:05

Tonia Merideth

Okay. And what years did you attend the Megginson School?

00:06:58:08 - 00:07:15:17

Geraldine Pettigrew

I was six in August. I was born in 1995 (?), so I was, I was born in....

Geraldine Pettigrew

I know, I know. I had just turned six in August, so. And I started school in September.

Tonia Merideth

Okay. And for the school year, was it a typical academic year, like now? Did you - what month did you begin and what month did they let out?

Geraldine Pettigrew

Well, we began in September, and school was out early June, the first part of June.

00:07:13:15

Tonia Merideth

Are there any other memories that you have of attending the school that you would like to share with us?

Geraldine Pettigrew

No. Well, when we when we came down here, we had to ride the bus. That was quite an experience. We had to ride the bus. And you met with the other students from all over the county and what not. And that was good because you met other people, you know, and what not. And I really enjoyed it. One of my favorite teachers was, the gym teacher, because I had wanted to go to school to be a gym teacher.

Tonia Merideth

And how was discipline handled at school if you didn't finish your assignments or if any of the children acted up? How was discipline handled in the class?

Geraldine Pettigrew

Well, now I'm really - I'm not sure because I usually tried to finish my mine and whatnot. But I do know, at one time, if the boys didn't behave, the principal spanked 'em. When he spanked 'em, he says "Sonny, you know better than that!"

Tonia Merideth

Did you have homework?

Geraldine Pettigrew

Yes.

Tonia Merideth

And you completed,

Geraldine Pettigrew

I did. I was - I wasn't the top person in the class. But when the exam time came, I was exempted from the final exams.

00:08:41

Tonia Merideth

And so then the next questions that I have are about the community and maybe some of the opposition or other experiences that you remember while you were going to school. Do you remember having some issues race wise in the community because of segregation? Do you remember any instances of that or experiences? While you were going to school?

Geraldine Pettigrew

No, because we went to our school then others went, you know. But where we live, was just Black in that section. There only was one other couple, a white couple that lived there, but they didn't live over in the other section with the other white people. It might've been because of their income. I'm not sure.

Tonia Merideth

So in thinking about going to school at that time, what did you think about education then and your experience then and what do you think about it now?

Geraldine Pettigrew

Well, I had always wanted to go to college. And after high school, my parents weren't able to send me. And we worried didn't know anything the scholarships and what not, so I didn't go to school until after I was married. And then I went to, you know, the school then.

00:10:17:15

Tonia Merideth

So when you were attending the Megginson School though, what did you think about the education that you were getting at the time?

Geraldine Pettigrew

Well, I really didn't know. I thought I was you know, everything was all right. I was just in my early teens. Well, like 13 and what not, you know.

Tonia Merideth

And so looking back on it now, what do you think about the education that you were getting?

Geraldine Pettigrew

It could have been better. It could have been better.

Tonia Merideth

And why do you say that would - what could have been - what things could have been better at the school you were going?

Geraldine Pettigrew

Well, the reason I said it, is because when I got to high school, high school, we didn't have any typing or any office skills offered to us. Now, we had home economics for two years. That's what the girls say.

00:13:47

Tonia Merideth

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

Geraldine Pettigrew

What do I think about the information?

Tonia Merideth

What do you think about the efforts to preserve the history and to reach out to the former pupils that attended and to collect those history? To preserve it?

Geraldine Pettigrew

I think it's very good. It's very good. And it should be education for the people that come home (?) to let them know what we went through when we were coming.

Tonia Merideth

So when when you were attending school, did you notice the differences in the schools you attended and the white schools?

00:12:39:16 - 00:13:16:10

Geraldine Pettigrew

The white schools, were offered office skills and whatnot. And the ones that didn't go to high school, could go and get a job, like in the stores and whatnot. And we weren't because we didn't have the skills and whatnot. And if we wanted to work, we either went to the laundry or to work for somebody in their home, taking care of their children or cleaning their homes or whatnot. That was back in 1946.

00:12:37

Tonia Merideth

Did your - do you remember your parents impressing upon you the importance of education? Did your parents really push you guys to.

Geraldine Pettigrew

No. But they made sure that we finished high school - made sure that we finished high school. But like I said, they weren't able to send to college. We didn't know anything about scholarships or anything. And nobody informed us. And I guess maybe we should have inquired more, but we didn't. And I just wasn't able to go until after I got married, you know, my husband saw that I went to school.

Tonia Merideth

And I'm sorry. What was the name of the school that you went to after you got married?

Geraldine Pettigrew

After I got married, I went to Central Virginia Community College. And I got my associate's degree from there.

00:13:32

Tonia Merideth

Very good. Thank you so much for joining us for an oral history interview. Thanks, Geraldine. We appreciate you sharing all of that with us. Thank you.