

00:00:00:01 - 00:00:21:06

Tonia Merideth

Good Morning. Thank you for joining us for an oral history interview for the Virginia Museum of History and Culture exhibit "A better Life for their Children: Julius Rosenwald, Booker T Washington and the 4978 schools that changed America." My name is Tonia Merideth, the oral historian. Please state your name and the school that you attended.

00:00:21:09 - 00:00:32:15

Pat Beach

My name is Patricia Scott Beach, and I attended the Cape Charles Rosenwald School. Thank you.

00:00:32:18 - 00:00:37:23

Tonia Merideth

So, Patricia, could you please tell us about your family and where you were born?

00:00:37:25 - 00:01:31:22

Pat Beach

I was born at 540 Jefferson Avenue in Cape Charles on the last election night for Franklin Delano Roosevelt. My father was James Scott and my mother was Edna Mathews Scott. And in 1947, my brother James Scott, the third was born. And in the beginning, we were living with my grandparents. And then in 1954, we moved to a house that my grandfather built. The interesting thing is that we have lived in for houses in Cape Charles on and have done the same side of the street.

00:01:31:25 - 00:01:33:04

Pat Beach

And we love it.

00:01:33:07 - 00:01:39:00

Tonia Merideth

So your family has been in the Cape Charles area for many generations?

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Pat Beach

We left basically in 1963. There was a - there were job opportunities at Bryn Mawr College in Bryn Mawr Pennsylvania. People from the eastern shore - a lot of them worked at Bryn Mawr College. When there was an opening, they would tell somebody from Virginia and they would go. So there were many people from the Eastern Shore who worked at Bryn Mawr college.

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Pat Beach

So my mother went in 1963 when I was a senior in high school. And then that was the same year that the ferries that crossed from Kiptopeoke to Little Creek Ferry discontinued and they started well, they were beginning to complete the construction of the Chesapeake Bay Bridge and tunnel. And that's how we went north because of the employment opportunities.

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Pat Beach

And then my brother stayed here until he completed high school, living with my grandparents.

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Tonia Merideth

Can you tell me what are some of the memories that you have growing up here?

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Pat Beach

We had lots of fun. It was a segregated community, but it was a community. Everybody knew everybody. I remember skating. I remember there was a place called the Carver Spot, which is next to the movie theater. And the Carver spot was where we socialize. I guess it had a jukebox. You could get food, you could dance. It was a gathering place.

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Pat Beach

Next to that was the Carver Theater. And above the Carver theater was an insurance company owned by Viola Tabb and her husband Brooklyn Tabb. And as a matter of fact, the night that I was born, my parents went to a movie, came home. Seems like I was born a half hour later delivered by Miss Bee Custis, who was a midwife.

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Pat Beach

And my mother said that for \$40 I was cared for for an entire month after delivery. One of my memories was during the time of (de)segregation. Okay, so when I was born, we were colored. And then I think we became Negro. Then were African-American, and then we were black. And there we were black and African. But at the time of segregation, I was walking on the boardwalk.

00:04:49:03 - 00:05:16:1

Pat Beach

There's a beach. And I recall that this town police officer, Foxwell, told me that I couldn't go beyond a certain point. Now, at one time, the ferries – and this was before I was born - this is Jefferson and the next street over is Washington. Cars lined up to get on the ferry. And now there are pylons there.

00:05:16:17 - 00:05:48:25

Pat Beach

And I think one of the memories I have is that the sewer system ended at Jefferson Avenue and you could see toilet paper floating at the end of Jefferson because that's where the sewer system was. And we had a very small section of the beach. But it was a section that we had, and I also recall that our church, First Baptist Church Cape Charles, did baptizing in the bay.

00:05:48:27 - 00:05:56:24

Pat Beach

Right. Just at the end of this block, until we got a baptismal pool in the church.

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Tonia Merideth

So can you tell me what year did you attend the Rosenwald schools and how many years did you.

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Pat Beach

I attended from grade one through grade seven. Probably I started in 50 or 51. I was born in 44. I was probably six. So that's 50. I would say about 50 of 1950 or 1951, graduating in 58.

00:06:27:16 - 00:06:35:25

Tonia Merideth

Do you remember what time of day or what time school started and when it let out?

00:06:35:28 - 00:07:13:29

Pat Beach

I could probably tell you we got out of school around three. Now, I guess my recollection is that we got a ride to school before the parents on the way to work, but I definitely remember walking so coming home from school. We walk along the side of the road and the sidewalk. I think we crossed the street. Then we walked across the bridge that we call the bridge the hump.

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Pat Beach

But it was a railroad overpass because the trains ran and after passenger trains stopped, it was freight trains that came into town. And then we walked down the street and down Fig Street. And one of my favorite things to do was to go into Mr. Thorn's gas station to buy a creamsicles. It's just one of the things that I remember that I love doing.

00:07:48:01 - 00:07:50:24

Tonia Merideth

Do you remember any of your teachers?

00:07:50:27 - 00:08:13:12

Pat Beach

Yes, the teachers were Mrs. Jenny, Jeannette Jones. I think it was Mrs. Alice Ames. Mr. Hare was a teacher and he was the principal?

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Tonia Merideth

Do you remember how discipline was handled in the classrooms? Any experiences?

00:08:22:15 - 00:08:56:22

Pat Beach

I was a really good kid in school. I didn't get a lot of discipline, but I remember, I think they use rulers and they cracked the knuckles. Something like that. No beatings on your posterior (laughter) or anything like that. But - Or standing in the corner, maybe writing something over and over again. But that was just about it.

00:08:56:24 - 00:09:00:09

Tonia Merideth

Do you remember any of the classroom materials that you used?

The books?

00:09:01:23 - 00:09:03:29

Tonia Merideth

Do you remember any?

00:09:04:02 - 00:09:32:20

Pat Beach

The craziest thing is I remember coloring Robin's – the craziest thing, but that was just one of my memories, I guess I liked art or whatever it was. And I like participating in plays and reciting singing things like that.

00:09:32:22 - 00:09:36:16

Tonia Merideth

Did you have carnivals or special activities?

00:09:36:18 - 00:09:48:15

At the school?

Well, obviously we had Mayday since I was the Mayday Queen in '58 that I, I didn't know until I saw a photo. Yes.

00:09:48:18 - 00:09:52:26

Tonia Merideth

So you don't remember being chosen or how that selection was made?

00:09:52:26 - 00:10:01:22

Pat Beach

Not at all. I actually I was probably shocked because it's just a memory from so long ago.

00:10:01:24 - 00:10:07:16

Tonia Merideth

So what was that? May Day? What was that in celebration of? Or what kind of activity?

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Pat Beach

Just – and it continued in high school where we wrapped the maypole. I remember that from the early years in high school of the in and out and going around and dancing. And wrapping the Maypole? Yes.

00:10:24:11 - 00:10:34:01

Tonia Merideth

Do you remember the school building? Do you remember? I can describe what the building looked like on the inside.

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Pat Beach

Okay. So I think the principal's office was to the right, there was a classroom behind that one and there was classrooms to the left. And you could come into the building. You have to come up steps, and straight ahead was the auditorium cause it had a center aisle and two side aisles. There was a piano down to the left. Two entries on the stage. Curtains on stage.

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Pat Beach

Yes, sir. Yes, I remember that.

00:11:04:27 - 00:11:13:07

Tonia Merideth

And do you remember in the winter, how did they keep the school warm?

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Pat Beach

Not the foggiest but it was not cold. And I'm sure we didn't have stoves in the -maybe we radiators, I have no clue.

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Tonia Merideth

Do you remember any of the chores that the children performed? Maybe if the boys had specific chores that they did and the girls had chores that they didn't do.

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Pat Beach

The only chore I remember is the erasing the boards and washing them, blackboards.

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Tonia Merideth

And what type of bathroom facilities did you have?

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Pat Beach

Maybe, two stalls, but we had indoor plumbing that that I recall.

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Tonia Merideth

Do you remember having a best friend or any of the students that you went to school with at the time?

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Pat Beach

Oh yeah, lots of them, oh my goodness. Ida Harmon, the Doggett family, the Gothicans, the Samples, the Mitchells, the Ayers family, the Church family, just – oh the Clark family, the Spady family, the Johnson family, the Loughlin family, the White family. I knew almost everybody in every school I attended because that was my thing.

00:12:57:11 - 00:13:01:05

Tonia Merideth

Do you remember how lunch was provided? Did you bring your own lunch?

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Pat Beach

I think we brought our own. I don't recall that we had cafeteria facilities because the school was so small.

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Tonia Merideth

Can you remember what a typical lunch was like? Do you remember what you would bring for lunch?

00:13:18:01 - 00:13:30:27

Pat Beach

No. Somehow I remember when we came home from school, Momma made cream of chicken soup.

00:13:31:00 - 00:13:34:04

Tonia Merideth

So what school did you attend after Rosenwald?

00:13:34:07 - 00:14:06:16

Pat Beach

So after Rosenwald, we all in the county attended Northampton County High School in Mathipongo. So we there was a school bus that came to Cape Charles, and everybody was supposed to go to the Carver spot – in front of the Carver spot to catch the bus. And our bus driver was Mr. David Bailey. And you always did the speed limit, which was 35 miles an hour.

00:14:06:18 - 00:14:37:06

Pat Beach

And as you go down 13 now, they have leveled it. But at that time there was a dip in the road. And so it was quite an adventure. Dip in the road to go to Matchipongo. And it seems like we catch the bus by 8:00am. I think - and sometimes I didn't make it but the the stop sign was right there at the end of the street so I would catch him at the stop sign.

00:14:37:09 - 00:14:53:06

Tonia Merideth

Okay so at the time the Rosenwald schools were funded and built because of segregation. Do you remember any experiences - you mentioned one earlier - but any other experiences about race conditions in the community, do you ever remember any opposition to the Rosenwald school, students getting persecuted, ridicule, anything at the time?

Pat Beach

I don't remember that. But what I remember is that after the incident with Officer Foxwell, I went to the municipal service building to find out where it was in the book that said I couldn't walk on that boardwalk, but we generally got along very well with the townspeople. But my grandmother was a domestic, and she worked for Mrs. Dorothy Downs, who lived on Madison Avenue.

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Pat Beach

But I don't remember a lot of negative racial things because we had our own community. We we didn't have fighting like that. You, I guess you could say for among those you were with rather than other folks.

00:16:27:08 - 00:16:58:03

Pat Beach

But I really don't recall that there was that kind of animosity. You know its just we co-existed in town. Strange thing, I think while we were in town, we didn't go to restaurants, You know, you ate at home, or you ate it somebody else's house. We would go to Big Mama's house - oh my God, the best hot rolls and macaroni and cheese and fried chicken.

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Pat Beach

It's that - we cooked. We ate. Yeah. We shared food, but no restaurants. And I guess when it came, it was Savage's drugstore. And I really don't remember that there was a place that we went until maybe after high school. I just don't remember that, maybe some other folks can clarify it, but I just don't remember.

Restaurant food was in our neighborhood. Somebody cooked it. I remember they talked about Mary Eliza had, she sold yot at the Carver Spot and you could get food and there were other places in the black community, but as far as integrated eating didn't have that. Yeah.

00:17:54:04 - 00:18:07:29

Tonia Merideth

Yeah. So when you think about attending the Rosenwald school, what what do you what did you think when you were attending at the time and what do you think about the education now.

00:18:08:01 - 00:18:49:27

Pat Beach

Okay, so the education was provided by caring teachers. They wanted you to learn. They wanted you to pay attention. They wanted to prepare yourself for your future. And they were very strict about what they wanted you to learn and to be able to do. And at that time, you learned also cursive writing instead of just printing, which I understand they no longer do. (laughter).

00:18:49:29 - 00:19:24:22

Pat Beach

But we were pretty well prepared. One of my other memories is that because my grandmother worked in the home of Dorothy Downs, I guess she would bring home magazines and one of the magazines that I got exposed to very early in my life was Reader's Digest, and I still subscribe to Reader's Digest for the variety of stories that it exposes you to.

00:19:24:25 - 00:20:13:23

Pat Beach

And also the vocabulary, and I would say from the learning how to read and all of that, they taught you. When I went to high school, I was prepared for reading. I was never behind and very surprisingly, when I went to college - I went to Virginia State, I was - after taking the placement test, I was in advanced reading, I said, Wow, like with kids from New York and Chicago and other larger cities that had much better educational opportunities than we had at Northampton High school.

00:20:13:23 - 00:20:23:04

Pat Beach

But we were prepared in the basics because we had caring teachers throughout.

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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?

00:20:32:05 - 00:21:03:01

Pat Beach

I think it's fantastic. Now, mind you, we never knew it was Rosenwald school until very recently. Never heard the name Rosenwald. We just knew it was the school across the hump and our school was next to the town dump - to go to the school, there was a road that went to the right, but I guess is where you took the trash. People took the trash to the dump and next to the dump

00:21:03:01 - 00:21:30:23

Pat Beach

was our school. And so we've learned a lot about the history of how that came to be. But those were the circumstances. And we went to school. We accepted the situation as it was, and we were I would say I was never traumatized by it and I didn't know anybody that was traumatized, but it was the way it was.

00:21:30:26 - 00:22:11:08

Pat Beach

We didn't have that kind of trauma that, perhaps, let me call it acrossed the bay. But I think even now this Eastern Shore of Virginia is different. Maybe it's because we are in it together. And now two blocks from here is - was the white school - I think well, in 1963, it was at the time when I was in school, it was not an option.

00:22:11:11 - 00:22:34:06

Pat Beach

But I think they say by 1970 or so, that was the school that everybody in Cape Charles had to attend. And by then we had long gone. What I loved about going to Northampton High School is that because all the black children from the county went there knowing high school is that because all the black kids in the county went there, you got to meet people from the entire county.

00:22:34:09 - 00:23:09:23

Pat Beach

So I had friends from all over. It was great. It was absolutely wonderful. And I felt free to participate in everything I wanted to participate in. And I was in everything that I wanted to be in. Yes, it is just the I feel that we had a rich heritage here, a great community. I think that I love what's going on in Cape Charles now.

00:23:09:23 - 00:23:59:27

Pat Beach

Once I graduated in 1963, went to Virginia State, graduated in 1967, and from there we would Philadelphia to the and we visited Cape Charles occasionally, but we came back into home ownership. My parents transferred the house that I grew up in to us, and we remodeled it. It's a small house and we remodeled it, modernized it, central air and heating and it was large enough until our family expanded.

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Pat Beach

And then in 1920 12, we got this house, bought this house, and it was the Raymond Speedie house, one of the business leaders of the communes. And I think this is a really great time to be in Cape Charles. It's now a resort town and the Rosenwald School project we just got introduced to maybe two years ago, we've attended two annual meetings and I was so inspired by the first annual meeting because of the mixture of people who are invested in seeing that our Rosenwald project is successfully completed, that they are repurposing our school.

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Pat Beach

It is the best thing in the world to see such a mixture of people who are really dedicated. I mean, all kinds of professionals who are giving of their time, their energy and their ideas and the enthusiasm to preserve a major part of our history. Now, the population of Cape Charles has shifted greatly, but one of the things that I have noticed is that the homes in what used to be the black committee community that are now standing are the homes that black people owned, where the renters lived.

00:25:42:13 - 00:25:57:06

Pat Beach

A lot of them were torn down by the landlords. And that's why we have more new construction in where the black community used to live because so many of those houses have been torn down.

00:25:57:09 - 00:25:59:12

Tonia Merideth

Thank you so much.

00:25:59:14 - 00:26:00:12

Pat Beach

You're so welcome.