

Cape Charles Rosenwald Foundation Restoration Initiative
Oral History Interview – October, 19 2013

Charles Bell (interviewee)
Loubna Rashid (interviewer)
Jessica Dinkins (interviewer assistant)
Linda Schulz (interviewer assistant/program director)

Sex; Age; Ethnicity; City of Habitation

CB: Male; #; African American; Northampton County, Virginia

LR: Female; #; Moroccan; Virginia Beach, Virginia

JD: Female; 21; Caucasian; Norfolk, Virginia

LS: Female; #; Caucasian; Cape Charles, Virginia

(0) LR: good afternoon Mr. Bell [CB: good afternoon] my name is Loubna Rashid and uh we'll be just having uh, a very uh peaceful and kind conversation about what happened uh a long time ago [CB: mhm] and how it affected uh all the uh uh the people who were involved and even people who were not involved at the time uh when were you exactly a part of the Cape Charles schools

CB: well actually i'm really uhm, uh, explaining the experiences from my wife i was not directly involved in it but uh from the experiences that she had uh this is where I'll be speaking from today

LR: yes sir and uh ho-how long was your wife [CB: uh] in in this <INAUDIBLE>

CB: fifty nine- nineteen fifty-nine she had her first teaching job there,

LR: and w-what was she teaching there

CB: she was teaching first and second grade

LR: oh okay, okay how- how much was this important for her at that time and why did she actually choose to be uh a teacher

CB: well, she uh i think from young- young childhood she wanted to become a teacher she had uh people in her family that were you know educators and also she was very fond of children and th- uh you know quest for learning and so forth and she was very innovative in all the things she did and attempt to get out of the children you know their potential

LR: right well th- that is all a beautiful purpose w-was she doing all this because of something that happened before in the past what she saw what happened in the past what was really making her uh love you know uh to do this to do with all the children

CB: looking at the plight of uh students particularly in the African American communities uh she felt she could uh really uh be uh a force for improvement in their- in access to education [LR: uh huh] and... <INAUDIBLE>

LR: and that's how [CB: <INAUDIBLE> that's how it began] okay okay and uh how did you find actually what she was doing did you agree with everything she was doing uh were you happy uh uh w- d-d- with everything that she was teaching uh w- what was your experience with your wife at that time when this was happening

CB: what i liked about her teaching was the fact that she wanted to be sure that the children of hers were uh were actively involved and engaged in things that would be beneficial not only then but in the future uh realizing that uh they had minimal material to work with and uh since she was in elementary education she was uh good in arts and crafts and uh they did not have the materials uh at the school she actually made uh a lot of the things that she used [LR: okay] for everything she taught

LR: she made- she made herself that's amazing

CB: yes they did not supply they uh materials that the students actually needed and the teachers needed to really teach

LR: so she she really believed that everything she was doing she was doing it for uh good cause and uh [CB: yes] there will be change there will be hope for some change in the future [CB: right] that's wonderful that's wonderful did you have uh i mean of course it's a personal question but uh did you have your own children together and was she doing the same thing for your children

CB: oh yes oh yes, very much so—

LR: —what was the—

CB: as a matter of fact uh my granddaughter who's in the seventh grade right now she is an honored reader right now because of what my wife taught her you know even i had to- i was reading to her

LR: so she made really a big uh [CB: oh yes yes] difference in in the family people around her and everything [CB: yes] that's amazing that's amazing and uh.. h-h- how did d-d- the former students for example or how did your wife for example thing it-it was compared with what was available for the white at that time

CB: i was- now re-repeat that again

LR: there was—was there any difference for example the behavior or between white students and African American students

CB: well at this time they were not integrated [LR: okay okay] see the school at this time uh it was not integrated [LR: okay] therefore there was- it was not one of the things that went into play here

LR: and how was the educational cultural and social environment uh of the school at that time

CB: it was great

LR: in all the senses

(5) CB: yes because uh the parents were actively involved [LR: mhm] now back then the entire community was involved

LR: h-how were they involved do you remember exactly what happened

CB: well, uh fundraising attending uh PTAs and you know getting actively involved and seeing that the teachers got what they actually needed

LR: they were willing to help at the time

CB: oh y- right

LR: no problems at all [CB: no... no] that's great and uh how about churches for example and how- how did that help in this aspect

CB: well the churches were very uh active in the school system itself as a matter of fact again thinking about the deprivation of the materials and of- and of things they wanted to fill the gap because uh you kn- realizing that [LR: mhm] that the children were not getting what they needed nor were the teachers [LR: mhm] so they thought that they had to you know take lead in doing

LR: take a lead and help—do you think or do you feel that they were really helping at that time with what they were doing—

CB: --yes [LR: okay] sure of course they were

LR: what about the parents i mean beside the fact that uh w- was there anything specific or special that they were doing for the children at that time that made a difference

CB: well actually uh i would say basically uh one of the things they actually did was, in the beginning was taught the kids to be respectful [LR: respectful] uh to be attentive and underlying importance of learning and what it would do for them in the future

LR: so they believed- they believed that knowledge and education [CB: yes] would absolutely make a change—

CB: yes [LR: <INAUDIBLE>] it would make a change in their entire cultural environment

LR: do you think there was any separate type of culture at that time, or it was the same culture everywhere

CB: ... mm i think it was basically the same culture [LR: it was the same culture] yeah

LR: uh tell me a bit about your wife Mr. Bell i'm sure uh at that time uh beside the fact that you told me that she helped a lot of people around her including her family was- was there something in specific that you can tell me about her uh something that made a change something that you will remember forever something that touched your heart

CB:...she was an individual that would uh, help others in other words she would put her life aside, that she'd be able to help people and uh she was always involving- in doing things a matter of fact she got uh a young girl that was uh that was livin uh there was no male in the household and course they were poor, she brought the young lady home she washed her hair she gave her clothes and uh things of that nature and uh she always felt that there was something she could do to improve uh the plight of the people, and she did everything she could possibly do in that respect [LR: that's nice] and uh she loved people

LR: she loved people [CB: yes] she was the peoples person [CB: yes] she was always you know whenever [CB: always] and she made herself happy by doing that [CB: yes, yes] okay... uhm... if you have the ability to change anything for example that happened before to now what would you change

CB: in the school system or

LR: in the school system absolutely... if there is anything that you had the power to change

CB: <INAUDIBLE> w-well what i would do basically i realized that we have uh certain mandates from the sta- state however uh this teaching to tests that i uh i don't like that uh you have to basically give those kids uh an incentive to learn uh many of them come to school but do not have the uh skills that they need uh to begin uh, so what has to happen the school has to be able to uh you know bridge that gap [LR: that's right] uh, it- it says that you know it takes a whole community to raise a child and every child has to have an opportunity to achieve to his or her greatest uh expectation [LR: yes you're right] and so what i would do basically is to

(10) encourage the teachers encourage the educators uh these uh administrators to be sure that they are uh thinking in terms of uh <DOOR OPENING> allowing that child to be him or herself and to uh make learning fun, uh s-some schools have even- not here- but uh cuttin out education or some of the activities such as uh uhm matter a fact they reduced the time the kid has out – out of uh the academic arena that's good in one respect but you have to be able to teach the whole child [LR: right] and uh i-i-i-im concerned because uh w-we have we have p-participate in a global society now so we don't know where they gonna be China Russia or wherever they gonna be and they have not been well informed well taught and given an opportunity to explore things uh then they will not be able to survive there

LR: s-so my understanding of uh somehow they were forced to uh follow uh an academic or an education that is not meant to be successful

CB: right, what we have to do is to be sure that we are teaching kids uh based on where they are and where we expect them to be and where we expect them to go and in order to that then one old saying the shoe does not fit on everyone so what you have to do is to be sure that you are teaching in your particular era and also teaching in a manner which the child will be able to expand on what you have taught and to live in other societies

LR: right right, and uh this segregation, was it a true segregation for you

CB: yes, it was awful,

LR: w-w-what can you tell me about that

CB: well in the first place we were not allowed to vote, okay [LR: mhm] uh to participate in the governments and therefore we had to uh w- be, i guess controlled by whatever rules regulations in other words we were not being given our- they were not listening to us [LR: right] secondly uh in particular in this area we didn't have jobs you know the only uh basic jobs were farming you know field work so forth uh i worked matter a fact most of the children particular the African American some in other areas too worked before they went to school i picked strawberries before i went to school, and uh but my mom w- made us be sure that we put our subjects above and beyond what we were you know uh, actually involved in—in other words what i'm trying to say is uh she wanted us to be sure that we'd be able to move from the field to whatever area we could possibly doctor lawyers so forth

LR: absolutely so your mother actually was also uh uh a very important uh person in your life [CB: oh yes] she was the one who was uh helping you make [CB: and my father] and your father too

CB: my father as well because what he- he said to me at one time uh once you become educated no one- but no one can take that away from you [LR: that's right]

it's important and it actually and even on his dying bed he told me this to make sure that i went to school

LR: i-i- can feel your words because my father told me the same thing before he died [CB: mhm] uh he always told me that you know uh i understand perfectly i mean education is a gift that no one can take away from you [CB: absolutely] and uh i'm glad your parents did that with you uhm is there anything special about you parents that you can tell me about- what they did for you and your uh brother and sisters if you had some and what if there is anything that you know you can remember,

CB: they made us proud uh proud one because they were our parents proud because they taught us right from wrong and they wanted us to achieve you know and to be able to do things like any other child be able to do and uh.. always help people, my mom she uh cliché uh you never know who's gonna have to give you a drink of water and to be sure that you treat people right treat people as you wanna be treated and this is something that she and my father taught us [LR: tha- that's amazing] yeah and uh there were eight of us

LR: that's amazing and uh your brothers and sisters w- i mean how did they live their life uh did they listen to your parents did they uh uhm how was their life [CB: good] or is their life h-

(15) CB: because of my father and my mother none of us none not one of us of the either w- had and engagement with the law you know uh a-and they all achieved, uhm, uh they we have three people in my family who are teachers, uh... an administrator and you know other various endeavors, and, we w-, we were taught that we have to move in other words continually progress and move forward [LR: mhm] and uh in all aspects of life

LR: uh w- i'm going to go back again to Cape Charles school and i-i just wanted to know if there was any support i mean we talked about the community channel was there any you know community support something that we don't know about and you would like to share with us something that you still remember until now

CB: support from the community

LR: from the community

CB: i don't know—back to you know they were actively involved in basically all the activities [LR: okay] in other words it was a close knitted community uh even though it was we called it the school over the hump [LR: right, right] and it was out of the town uh the parents were actively involved in attending the activities and helping as a matter a fact uh some of the uh parents would uh transport the kids to school in uh in climate weather matter a fact Mr. Davis James Davis father had a taxi cab company and of course occasionally they would uh take kids across the hump

LR: so what do you think about you know for example uh where the school was built or about where it was what do you think about that because it was you know it was the hump so the students would walk and it was very known because of that what do you think about that

CB: i did not like it at all because it was where the uh city dump was [LR: okay] and so that was one of the uh that was you know breaking the hearts of people because even though it was an institution of learning they had a next door neighbor that was not so kosher [LR: uh huh] and of course it kind of separated them from the other portion of the town

LR: so people were aware of the situation [CB: oh yes] and they did not like it at all [CB: not at all] but they had to accept it

CB: at that time yes

LR: at that time [CB: mhm] uh im going to uh go back to your wife Mr. Bell and w- do you remember her students do you remember the contact she used to have with her students uh what can you tell me you know any story that she

CB: she was a mother to students, she was a teacher and a mentor for the children and they loved her i mean they really loved her uh to death uh ill use the term because they knew that she loved them and their- they reciprocated that

LR: is there any anecdote or anything you remember with this specific student something happen with this specific student [CB: mmm] that she was so- maybe she was talking about it all the time or she will tell you remember this student or something that touched her again...

CB: i was trying to remember, uhm, there's uh family in Cape Charles uh again there was a single mom, and what my wife did she told them about her brother who was a great mathematician he taught and he was to get scholarships at top university and three other institutions they got four scholarships and every Christmas uh w- we would receive a birthday card or a you know card from them and birthday cards and so forth they would send it to us and they always would uh recognize the fact that my wife was instrumental in uh allowing them to get an education from the most top university in the country and they did not have to pay uh anything at all [LR: all because of the help of your wife] right right and we actually uh occasional would you know send money to them uh, b-b- you know because the mother couldn't do it [LR: that's amazing that's amazing] w- you know i still even though my wife is passed i still receive cards from one of those young people

LR: that's exactly what i was going to tell you if you still had contact with any [CB: yeah] of the students that your wife used to deal with [CB: yes...yes] isn't that a

(20) beautiful feeling its an amazing feeling its like she is still here with you talking to and everything its what she did [CB: mhm] that uh that's why uh we you know why we still talking to her- about her today [CB: yes] uh you mentioned Christmas how was Christmas at that time

CB: ...well we always got toys... we did not get a lot of toys but it w- my parents always made it possible for us to get something and uh at the same time they wanted us to understand that that's not what Christmas was all about and uh the celebration of you know Christ birthday, and that uh its time to be joyful and to you know help and love people

LR: and what about the students uh did your wife used to talk about how they used to spend Christmas or how was it for them was it hard i- was it hard was it the same situation

CB: m-more or less and uh... she was uh as i said before she was a counselor in a sense and she would explain to them that uh you know what position uh how their parents what they could or could not assist them in certain things but they were doing the best that they possibly could under the circumstance [LR: right] and uh so they uh they they loved her for that <P:07>

LR: Mr. Bell of course we're talking about segregation and all that and i think this is an extremely important people because its all about- it's all about what happened at that time why it happened i-it is it soft in the minds of people now d-then but what w-what exactly w- what do you think uh if you can tell me briefly the experience about segregation desegregation anything you can tell me about this matter what you that that uh might uh make a ch- you know make a big change on whoever is going to be listening to this

CB: ...I would think that uh what i would like for them to do is to just consider uh they deprivation that was caused by not allowing certain people or certain cultures to uh achieve uh the American dream for one [LR: mhm] uh not allowin them to enter in education institutions as a matter a fact the library was closed we couldn't go to the public library [LR: - okay] and yet people complain about uh the condition and the kids when they went to school that they're not ready, yes the parents did what they could but you know they did not have the money to buy all these books

LR: so the library was closed

CB: of course

LR: and how uh how did people beha-

CB: the only way the only thing that uh you could get s- uh means was someone to do it for you and there were people who would be instrumental when you know d-d-doin some things that they were not supposed to do and based on the authorities

they still helped someone or give a book to someone, i remember the we had a ferry system you know before the bridge tunnel was built [LR: mhm] i remember goin across under the steamers, and they had uh uh lunch counter and of course you had uh colored side says colored and one said white and it was i would say an area about this wide really for us to assemble and to eat and we couldn't go to the front of the counter we had to go at the end and that was one thing i always asked my mom and my dad about you know, why

LR: you didn't understand at the time

CB: no i did not, and, but what they always a-ask us not to do was to hate people because of what they did or what they do at that time, and to be sure that you understand that everyone deserves to be treated as you wish to be treated.. when i first ran for the board of supervisors in Northampton county, uh fortunately the educational uh organization Northampton education association was instrumental in helping me coming elected for black and white and uh the first time i ran i did not win but the second time i did, and

(25) of course i spent twelve years on the board of supervisors for the i-i felt that there was something that we could do to entice and assist the community im still trying to do that as well i was in a committee we met uh started meeting in February of this year February thirteen of twenty thirteen to try and change the <INAUDIBLE> ordinances so that uh we could you know don't have so many restrictions that don't allow people to come here [LR: mhm] we had several industries that wanted to locate in Northampton county but they did not want to come because they had to spend so much money right now uh we have a coup- matter a fact royal farms wants to be located down in the Cape Charles area, but there was a particular uh, zoning ordinance that was prohibited that hopefully they're going to use the uh recommendations that our committee by lifting that particular [LR: <INAUDIBLE>] and also types of uh uh buildings a hotel wanted to come there and they talked about you know too much highth or bind- or sight uh what they call the crystal view of Northampton county but what they failed to realize is what they're doing is, hurting our future generations right now we d- what do we have, the hospital is the and the social ser- they are the high uh they uh the people that hire most people and because they pay sure concrete, and that's it [LR: hm] when our children graduate they have nowhere to go nothing to do here and they wanna go back.. all three of my daughters wanted to return, after they you know went to college but it was difficult because they either had to teach work in the field gra- because buidinesses were not uh really, concerned or where they're hiring

LR: not a lot of opportunities [CB: right] very few [CB: very few opportunities] either this or this

CB: even for the children not just uh African American but children period, there's not much for them to do unless their family owned a business, and they can you know so when they graduate, they go to other communities and grow and help them but we have spent the money to educate them

LR: that's right you mentioned before uh that for example when you were a kid you used to be on your own and you didn't understand for example the separation [CB: mhm] and i asked you if you uh you if the other kids used to talk about this or feel- did you used to talk about this like together like the children together say something about it [CB: yes] and d-d-did it hurt [CB: it hurt oh it did] does it still hurt

CB: yes it does yes it does, uh im able now to live with it

LR: but then it was hard because you didn't even understand what was happening

CB: i did not understand and uh because it was i know i-i-it was just i felt so unjust so wrong uh because you know i happen to come from a particular area or happen to be a particular culture that i'm denied of what most children had, why i didn't do anything that was wrong... but uh i don't know t-things have changed but they have not, uh, we've come a long way but we have a long way to go

LR: is it a slow change

CB: its very slow

LR: very slow change

CB: very slow

LR: and that's how African Americans see it especially after what happened

CB: i think they see it basically

LR: but in general

CB: in general its- unfortunately its not a multiplicity of people that feel that way uh its just like you see what's going on in congress its not for congress broken but not all of them its just a few people and my dad used to say the squeaky wheel gets the grease, in other words if you out there and you got a microphone, then that's w- that the people that listen to you and unfortunately those who really don't want to see things go on as they were going on uh they don't come forward, and that's been the problem [LR: yeah] <P: 04>

- (30)** LR: any memories remaining from for example what happened in the segregation something that happened at the time when maybe you w-w-were twelve thirteen fourteen years old may something that happened between uh because i'm very interested to know how children at that time used to think and talk together i mean like you said it was unfair and you used to talk about it but uh-h-e-uh i guess i'm curious to know if there is anything in specific maybe they tried to do something to

help the situation or was there any uh e-e-uh attempt to help in any ways and i'm talking about the children at that time

CB: yes i remember, a group of us uh i i lived in the Capeville area, when uh they Capeville schools abandoned which was all white school i w- the superintendent wanted to uh, allow us to go because we had seven <INAUDIBLE> oh uh built the structured schools for blacks <BREATH> and what happened was there was an individual who set fire to the school because the superintendent had said he was gonna allow the black kids c-c-called colored kids at the time to come, this guy had a truck that uh something was wrong with the exhaust system it was very loud and so forth, and uh it so happens we were in the area playing when he passed by i a-an you know the next morning we found out that the school had been set on fire [LR: mhm] .. my mom did not want us to talk to the sheriff because she felt w- the repercussions that would happen and, i-i-i im sure that there woulda been but we knew that he did it without a shadow of doubt, and that kind of hurt us because we wanted to be sure uh people found out who's responsible but i-it was never revealed who that person was but what happened this superintendent was smart- what he did in the session when schools not open- what he did he demolished all of the schools, it

LR: get rid of the—

CB: --get rid of those schools that dilapidated and what choice did they have but to open Capeville school for blacks, i never will forget him his name was Mr. Dehaven... and that was one of the things that kind of made us feel better about the conditions

LR: i-i have the feeling that some of these experiences happened to you either with your wife the segregation desegregation uh the students uh i think its making people uh like you and uh people who are around you uhm actually be more peaceful instead of being violent [CB: yes] because uh you uh your wife was a teacher you were involved in lot of things you d-the education of your parents gave you gave you uh actually a beautiful gift which is don't judge don't do uh you know don't uh seek revenge

CB: right right that was one thing that they that was taught to us in really in our mind we knew that uh, confrontation was not the answer because we'd become just as bad as the other people who are uh trying to hurt and even long before Martin Luther King talked about nonviolence that's what my parents believed in, and that's how we survived

LR: that's right, okay, i'm also very interested in discipline, was there any type of discipline for children at that time in Cape Charles School

CB: at the Cape Charles school no problem because again the parents were actually involved the children knew that if they went to school and misbehaved or did not

do what was right that is uh somebody a neighbor someone that the teacher talked to the parent that they were gonna be chastised when they got back home so there was no disciplinary problems [LR: so uh] no great disciplinary problems

(35) LR: and what about the fear were students experiencing uh fear all the time sometimes were they comfortable was there anything in particular that uh made them feel uh like maybe uncomfortable to go to [CB: no not to go to the school] to the school or maybe

CB: one thing well, basically what the parents tried to do was to uh have them to understand and to feel that they were loved but when they were doing something wrong they had to be chastised and of course uh that was one motiv-motivating factor that kept in them w-w-well nothing works one hundred percent but that kept down the disciplinary problems

LR: okay, <BREATH>,

CB: and then another thing too if i saw your child doing something i c- you know we believed in corporal punishment then, [<LAUGH IN BACKGROUND>] i could whip them

LR: okay, do you a difference between discipline at that time and today,

CB: its not uh discipline today is not uh, done, uh in a fair manner in other words we pick and choose because you know if i do something wrong and another kid comes around and does the same thing [LR: mhm] uh i think now we should consider of that uh you know same type of punishment should happen and also you have to think in terms of uh what that child brings to you as far as the environment from which they come as well [LR: right] that they are uh rich poor whatever that should have nothing to do with your disciplinary action

LR: so talking about rich and poor and the different social uh levels was a big [CB: yes] actually point at that time [CB: yes yes] and what about to day, was it worse then [CB: its better] its better today

CB: its better today but its still bad...cause people s- you know i tell i c-c-c- i still don't understand you know i'm eighty years old and i still don't understand why people feel that its okay for me to do certain things but not you [LR: right] ...we all the same

LR: we're all the same,

CB: we all have the same blood you know, it you know when you cut the blood looks that same

LR: same color

CB: same color and chemically biologically it's the same four basic groups but they're found in all races

LR: right, do you think it's going to change any time soon, since th- because you mentioned before that the change is very slow

CB: eventually [LR: mem] i-i-it will change it has to change uh right now what is happening uh one of the things its going to its going to make it change faster is because we are uh, multiplicities in other would there is no dominant race any more, and therefore- and children understand this the first class that i had that was integrated i-it i was bombarded with questions why did this happen, and i the only thing i could say to them was people just felt that they were right and.. in my classroom, i got the greatest respect from all the children no matter who they were rich poor black white so forth, you have to uh let children know that you love them and its not by words its by deeds more or less and if they believe in you you're gonna be okay..

LR: um to my understanding were you uh a teacher at a certain point of time what were you—

CB: -- i taught for thirty-two years <LAUGH>

LR thirty two years that's a long time [CB: yes] and i'm sure you have a lot of things to say about that but is there anything in specific that you would like to talk about and i'm talking of course about the segregation desegregation about the uh schools of course and uh everything that affected th-th-that time something in specific that you would like to talk about uh you were in the thirty two beautiful years of experience that you had

(40) CB: i started out in the elementary school i taught uh sixth and seventh grade, and uh when, integration took place.. i was called out to the high school uh to teach general science...and, uh i when i got the- my schedule, i noticed that i had- we had uh in those days uh pra-practical education general and academic you know and they would divide that in three academic groups, i had the then what happened mind you the superintendent said we need you down there you know at the high school, but when i got my schedule i had both of the practical and general and no academic, <BREATH> so my counterpart which happened to be Caucasian we set down and talked about he said hey you know, w-w-were not gonna let this go so i went to the principal i said now i- as a matter a fact i have more- i had taken more courses in biology and science than my uh prodigy and he- we had really decided that w-we should kinda mix this thing up you know, [LR: mhm] some academic some general so forth and he was reluctant- the principal was reluctant but he did it it bothered me because at first he said we need you but then we don't need you bad enough urgently enough that you'll be able to teach other than people that you thought were kind of you know having problems [LR:

mhm] or.. i couldn- i couldn't understand that but i was you know that this young man who was Caucasian uh w-we had a good relationship and he was man enough to say what we should do as far as solving that particular problem

LR: right so that brought you uh some kind of relief because [CB: yes yes] when you see someone who was not African American trying to tell you i'm with you somehow i am uh you know im helping you i am this injustice somehow this helps you

CB: yes it does as a matter a fact i talked with a young man who uh was talk- came and suggest retiring couple uh couple a weeks ago and he you know we were very good friends and we would not allow things of that nature w- su- what the principal tried to do to happen and we saw a teacher that was not doing what he or she should be doing we went to that teacher and that particular teacher did not change then we went to the principal [LR: good] and we were together

LR: that's amazing do you still have contact with him

CB: oh yes

LR: that's amazing

CB: yeah

LR: that's amazing.. those are the friendships that uh you will appreciate all of your life [CB: all of my life] right those are the things that you [CB: yes] you know you remember those are the voices that you still wanna hear that's amazing and uh... what would be your advice for the next uh generation something that you really want people to hear and maybe think about it after they hear it.. [CB: <BREATH>] with everything included after your wife uh everybody and everything that happened...

CB: what i would say to the generation that's coming up now, is to be sure that you are prepared for to enter into any institution uh any, uh academic arena, be sure that you uh understand people uh be sure that you uh become actively involved in the community process and love your neighbors as yourself [LR: right], be prepared academically socially morally in everyway possible and t-together that's the only way together we stand divided we fall and we're dealing with a global community now just the United States or not just our particular neighborhoods but we all have to mingle and deal with people from all ethnic backgrounds economic status so forth and, we're people all of us, God made us all

LR: that's right that's right does segregation desegregation remind you of anything that happened in United States before- is it a reminded of anything that was unfair before anything that happened [CB: slavery] okay that's how you feel it was [CB: yeah]...

(45) CB: <BREATH> America started out i-i-i-i s-s-sometimes say this but uh.. the nation was born in violence <BREATH> it was born because people felt- some people felt superior and m-mind you, i-I've been in several foreign countries, there's not other country I'd rather be than here but we do have our problems and if we can solve those problems and that is putting other person—in other words not feeling that i-its you and them and us don't you know, get those person pronouns uh uh mixed up its its about us you know [LR: right] not about me and that's the way it oughta be

LR: and this strength is by being together [CB: unity unity] and welcoming each other one person can do nothing

CB: in unity there is strength

LR: right

CB: yeah... but you know, learn all that you can and love, i used to have uh i was in charge of the black history programs and the former governor of Virginia Douglas Wilder came i had him to come speak to the kids and the kids asked him the question how did you become the governor, he said you know what i got all the books that i could find i read everything i could do i did all of these things, and i knew that i could achieve [LR: mhm] but i had to be equipped in everyway academically socially morally that i will be able to become a leader and not just a leader but a true leader an affective leader and the kids talked about that for a while and uh that's i thought it was- it was good

LR: that's an example

CB: yes it was a good example see he was the first uh matter a fact the only, uh African American uh governor for the state of Virginia.. <INAUDIBLE>.. i-i enjoyed teaching

LR: do you remember uh any of your students or your wife's students who became who because or you know who have right now uh beautiful positions important positions uh they continue their education they finish their education

CB: Charles Fisher is one of them he was a good athlete and matter a fact he was inducted in the hall of fame at the what was it O-D-U [LR: O-D-U] yeah uh huh, i was tryin to think of someone else, we have several people who are in businesses, uh they own their own uh there's a group of people that owns the truck for there are lawyers out there and when people when people return and talk to you and say you know what, i was inspired by some of the things that happened at the school and that's why i became who i am [LR: right] and that's a great thing yes [LR: that's a huge impact] and it makes you feel good as a matter a fact i tell the m you made my day and they do when we find that something that we have done has

enabled a child to succeed in life to become a profitable a person who is actively involved in society and doing things helping people, that makes you feel good [LR: that's right] yeah <P: 05>

LS: could i ask a couple of background questions as though <CLEARS THROAT>, excuse me just dates ho- when you said your wife started at the school in nineteen

CB: that was in fifty-nine

LS: and w- and when did she did she teach all the way through

CB: no she taught i think it was two years

LS: okay

CB: and then they called her to help out at which she taught uh second grade

LS: okay and how long were you married wh-

CB: four- we were married forty one years

LS: so you were married in [LR: forty one years] what year

CB: we were married in uh ninety sixty two yeah well she was teaching in uh at the school we were not married at that time we were just friends [LS: you were friends] yeah

(50) LS: okay uhm and then one thing i wanted to ask that uhm we kind of alluded to uhm but that i would like maybe to have the- for our video at least and that is uh <MOUTH CLICK> uh, in term- during segregation the- describe a little bit the conditions in the African American schools versus the while schools and i mean everything from you talked about the buildings what about the other- the other things

CB: books

LS: books, obviously you couldn't go to the library so

CB: couldn't go to the library but even the uh text books that were used uh by the African Americans many they were used first by Caucasians they were second-hand books the furniture the desk many of them were dilapidated old and used and wh- what was happening was what uh they would buy new materials for the while kids... and they would give us the old ones i believe in uh the first time i can remember i stand to be corrected however the first new desk we got were at the what then was uh maccapungo elementary school they got—when they built the school they got all new desk and in my memory that's the only time i can remember

during segregation that we got new desks.. and not only that .. the county allowed the administration allowed so much money for budget for materials .. and that was not true in all of the schools in other words uh like the Eastville was the white school at that time uh they uh the teachers were allotted a certain amount of money to buy materials whereas uh the people who were teaching the African Americans are meant to sometime make their own materials just as my wife did, because she was good at arts and crafts uh she would she was innovative and she did she made all kinds of things for herself using her money the- a that time her salary was minimal i don't remember what her salary was at that time but many people did many teachers did that [LS: mhm] used money because they you know felt a need to expose these kids to everything, and, that for the life of me i could not understand we were all were teaching all teaching kids but, we did not have- always have the materials that were funded by the school board

LS: and then one other thing- one other question over the conversations that I've had i really i'm so curious about- so once desegregation occurred in the end and the white and black kids went to the same schools, was the education still equal [CB: no no no no] so tell me about that- that to me i think is the key thing

CB: no no it wasn't <BREATH> [LS: why] for instance... black kids were placed in classes uh okay w-w-what happened it was supposed been separated in academic support based on their achievements <BREATH> what happened was that if you were black you were automatically placed in the lowest group, i mean they- just you he's black or she's black <P: 10> but i'm gonna put them in this because they cant do it and that's one thing that i hate to use this word but i despised, based on a persons ethnic background skin color you going to put you know you goin to segregate them, no, supposedly we all integrated but still that's what they did not only did they do-- <BREATH> teachers that were European Americans got to teach the academic kids, and the African American teachers basically generally would be teaching those persons that they felt would be problems in or who couldn't learn or whatever but they did they would—what they did by a

(55) selective uh procedure they did the token thing you know well she's teaching academic she's black but see overwhelmingly it was seldom around

LS: so they segregated the teachers as well as the students

CB: yes yes yes

LS: and when did that end [CB: <BREATH>] or did it, i think—<LAUGH>

CB: you're asking me the wrong question, its not over its much better i-i-i have to admit its so much better but it const- sometimes you know it kinda creeps in there [LS: mhm] i but uh,

LR: so Mr. Bell you feel there is some kind of control

CB: excuse me

LR: you felt there is some kind of control somebody controlling so that

CB: yes absolutely, i-i feel this way <BREATH> i was watching the- when uh... Dr. Goldstein became the superintendent lots of things changed you know

LS: and what year was that in the nineteen ninety something

CB: eeeeh i want to say, four or five i can't remember now but they didn't- they hated her guts because she was so New York she was one of those Yankees comin down here to mettle in our business, i liked her when i first saw her she did

LS: and they were, they people that they were talking about were, who, you said they hated her guts, who were they

CB: administrators

LS: okay <LAUGH>

CB: and it w- you know the general uninformed public

LS: yeah

CB: you see sometimes people jump on the bandwagon [LS: yes] just like they do with the superintendent he's doin what is- he's doing- Dr. Simmons is doin what has been mandated by the state, but there are those who feel that he is not doin the right thing [LS: mhm] had it not been for him putting into place what the state recommended the sate woulda taken over the schools [LS: yes...yeah] and a lot of people don't understand that

LS: but anyway back to... <BREATH> in the nineties was really when, desegregation that was supposed to have happened thirty years earlier [CB: mhm] really happened in other words they- there wasn't true integration that came except a lot of white [CB: yeah] parents fled ya know took their kids [CB: <INAUDIBLE>, and home schools] right so uh so that i mean that's that's kind of the context i think that's interesting to talk about

LR: im curious about w-one point

CB: yes

LR: media, did that help or make the situation worse

CB: in some instances it helped and some instances it made it worse i-i-it was depending on who the individual doing the reporting was <BREATH>.. and, what

their, motives were in other words when p- when people are going to professions sometimes they have certain motives you know, that are personal uh, they have certain battles that they want to fight, and this they ignore the others so you know, the media th- i-i- the media now as far as i'm concerned and i i don't profess to be profess to be uh an expert but uh journalism i th- i don't think is what it's supposed to be

LR: why would you say that Mr. Bell

CB: because they controlled by certain people, in other words, i have to report it this way and one of my problems when i was on the board of supervisors i asked them, please if you're going to make a statement you'd rather write something that i had said, do not add anything don't try to interpret if i said it- the narrative that i gave you don't change it [LR: mhm] if you change its not me and that's what's happenin in journalism right now unfortunately <BREATH> its being controlled by money [LS: mhm]

LR: Mr. Bell

CB: yes

LR: i appreciate your time uh everything you told us uh i'm sure is going to help a lot of people uh is there anything you would like to add any- uh you know words to students or anyone that can hear this message...

CB: i-i guess i would be repetitious but uh, if we plan to, have a, county <TAPE CUT OFF>

END: 1:00:20