

Cape Charles Rosenwald Foundation Restoration Initiative
Oral History Interview – October 13, 2014

John Nottingham (interviewee)
Delores Nottingham (interviewee sister)
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Sex, Age, Ethnicity, City of Habitation

JN: M # AA Northampton County, VA

JD: F 21 C Norfolk Virginia

DN: F # AA Northampton County, VA

LS: F # C Cape Charles, VA

(0) JD: alright my name is Jessica Dinkins we'll be conducting this oral history of Cape Charles um Mr. Nottingham so when were you actively a part of the Cape Charles rosenwald school

JN: [MOUTH CLICK] i was uh i started there in nineteen fifty-nine and i taught there until nineteen sixty-three and sixty-four each school year and i started teaching forth and fifth grades, it was a very interesting experience because i did not have any uh teaching prepped [PRON: /pɹɛpt/] [JD: mhm] education prepped for teaching although it's in my family it's in my blood [LAUGH] so that's why, i made out fine [JD: yeah yeah]

JD: so um you were teaching fourth and fifth grade wha- what was what was s-some things that made it interesting like challenges you had to over come without much

JN: well um there were many challenges being new to the education system in Northampton [PRON: /nɔfɦæmtɪn/] County and also teaching in Cape Charles you know they considered it they uh the city school [LAUGH] [JD: LAUGH mhm] and uh they had many uh, [MOUTH CLICK] Cape Charles's unique in a way that they thought they were in a town in a city and it was thriving at that time uh there was there were students who were interested in learning they were excited about learning and i thought i didn't know enough to give all that information they needed but uh what happened we had a dean supervisor who was in charge of the uh black schools and she uh she was very helpful also we had uh teachers there and a principle and they were all working together [PRON: /təgeðə/] for the good of the school it was really an interesting experience i enjoyed my years of teaching at uh Cape Charles, it was it laid the foundation for my early advance to the upper grades [JD: yeah] which i moved from uh, elementary school to the high school at that time

JD: oh okay how long were you teaching with the high school

JN: i cant recall because they changed from the middle school to the high school so i will i cant js- because it just changed over [JD: right right] can't recall the name and i cant recall just exactly when i you know when i changed from one-nother but if you look back and i think about it now, the eighth grade which i taught were always had had been were the middle school grades [JD: mhm] so therefore i was always in the middle school because i did not teach uh any uh any of the other grades other than the eighth grade uh i had tw- uh one ninth grade class and that was about it, [JD: very cool] mhm now there uh i had one ninth grade s-, i had one science class, and uh i remember that distinctly because i did not have any equipment [JD; hm] so we always taught from the books we didn't do any experiments [JD: CHUCKLE] it uh it was something it was one two Bunsen burner and that's about it [JD: that's definitely a challenge to over come] LAUGH yeah it was a challenge and i had some very exciting students in that class [JD: yeah] yeah yeah which was interesting [JD: excited to learn] yes excited to learn then uh that was the only science class i taught the other classes i taught there at the middle school well then the high school was transitioned from the middle school to the high school [JD: LAUGH] LAUGH high school to the middle school w- uh we had i taught math [JD: oh okay] so my i taught twenty-nine years as a math teacher [JD: wow] at Northampton [PRON:/ nɔfhæmtɪn/] County High School

JD: wow would you say this love for teaching kind of started with the school in Cape Charles

(5) JN: uh no- uh i think it was my family most of my family members were teachers [JD: really] yeah i had a aunt [PRON:/ ænt /] who t- t- well do you see that poster on the wall she was a teacher and then her sister was a teacher and also i had another uncle on my fathers side he was a tailor now my uncle Levi i don't know too much about him but uh he was a farmer and im not sure that he went to school at Hampton or not and at that time it was hampton normal institute but that's like i said my father c- came out of school in nineteen six and then built his house for my aunt mhm [JD: tell me a little bit about your aunt] and my grandmother... oh Mary Nottingham Smith she was a great lady [JD: yeah] she was an inspiration to the whole family uh she believed in her family and she was always interesting in getting her nieces and nephews into school and she did that, some stayed and some didn't [JD: CHUCKLE] but she do what she could to educate the her family members and uh anybody else she could help, uh tha- that that was her life she would come down here every Sunday from Accomac [PRON:/ ækəmæk/] and she would sit and talk with me about family about home about school and that's why i mhm

JD: very powerful [JN: mhm] powerful... [BACKGROUND TAPPING] good, uhm [MOUTH CLICK] ... how did the uh separate but equal doctrine affect the quality of education for African American students at the school <p: 04>

JN: [BREATH] there were the separation of races, but nothing was equal [LAUGH] we uh Cape Charles just happened to have the Rosenwald School probably the only brick building at that time it was Cap- uh im sorry which was f- formally white but uh that's just about it they uh you know they it was just that way so it was not equal [JD: just separate] just separate not even in terms of uh materials in buildings structure

JD: do you think that was, affective to the students desire to learn or do you think that was reflected in their desire to learn or did they, still have the same sort of fire for it

JN: well i [CHUCKLE] i found the students had a very strong desire to learn and that may be because of the conditions in which they were living in 'n in the town of Cape Charles there was a di- different a- atmosphere among the parents and the students, never have i seen such students who were willing and eager to learn even in the activities that we had we had a uh a community school where people would k- work together [PRON: /təgeðə/] with the churches the uh school would work together [PRON: /təgeðə/] the activities with the school and the community were intermingled into the daily activities [JD: mhm] of the county of th- uh town and it was really a very wholesome situation then we had uh there was we had religion we had students who would come and do their plays and parts and give scripture and we had uh groups of singers and it w- it was just an exciting time to have taught there that was my i- i- it left a good feeling on my part and i enjoyed it and it was the best experience i could ever had as a new teacher [JD: good] that's where i got my foundation from

JD: very good... as a former teacher uh, how do you think it compared to the, education standards that were available for white students in the town of Cape Charles at the time

(10) JN: well i was not familiar with the [LAUGH] [JD: LAUGH] education standards of the white students but im quite sure th- th- th- they had new books and things they had transportation you know they had so you it was just entirely different [JD: mhm] because everything revolved around that sc-school and uh we were a separate entity we are outside almost outside the town limits its out there on the edge and we were next to the dump so we uh it then you know its obvious that [LAUGH] they had uh a better quality of life as far as education and... economically too [JD: yeah]

JD: did you feel there was um a sort of lack of support or was there support by the white community for the school or was it more an effort of the African American community to kind of get it-

JN: -well it had initially because uh the rosenwald they uh they had to raise money to get that school there and the community had to put up so much money so that uh there were some whites who helped [PRON: /helpt/] and still do

JD: very good [JN: mhm]... what was the um educational social cultural environment i -er you mentioned with religion playing a big aspect [JN: oh yes] in the community and everything do you think that has kind of carried over into the social environment of today [JN: no] surrounding the school [JN: no no] how so

JN: it has not been carried over and that's what makes and yeah I moved from the county schools to Cape Charles well some of it was there yes but then over time when we integrated it changed

JD: how do you think integration played a role in it

JN: [SIGH] oh integration <p: 04> uh integration did not, [SIGH] integration was not integration it was not integrating the, the fabric of all people who were involved, there was still segregation within the integrated schools, they had these uh classes divisions that [MOUTH CLICK] and they were separate uh they had the uh the academics you had a general group and then head board would call the slow group the practical they called it practical and uh it was just it w- it w- just like what it should be people were not they uh it was dishonesty there was dishonesty in integration itself there was not a pure form of integration, even today [JD: really] yes

JD: what all goes on today that you notice of it

JN: all the economic standards of the county of the people who are here [JD: mhm] y-y- y- e-e-e you have a wide variety of uh i should say standard of livin yet so many people are poor and not able to achieve and because of the fact that they're the- they- well let's call the European Americans [JD: CHUCKLE] who have all this material wealth [PRON:/wel?t/] and access to all types of uh legal... what do they call it uh connections that is what i meant and the way your blacks did not, then we have a uh a poverty list that's just well poverty is high among the Afro-Americans and there's nothing here for young Afro-Americans student to do that will give him a a good [PRON:/ gut/] jo- uh American job in other words im saying where he can become an access to his community by owning a home [JD: mhm] and living the American dream [BACKGROUND INAUDIBLE WHISPER] [JD: mhm] not [JD: yeah] so you got these mm- every thing is one sided it's not like it should be

JD: hm... do you think there's possibility for that to change...

(15) JN: [SIGH] not in my life time [BACKGROUND TAPPING] people will not change because they are people are selfish they're concerned about themselves people have no concern about the person who's uhh homeless, and then y- y- if you do have if you have a concern but what can you do to move that person from one level of

society to another [JD: mhm] just give him something one day at a time does not satisfy that person i- i- its not helping him even if you give 'em two or three days, he needs something that will move out of his uh s- way of living even with now with the verterans that are being returning home they're not being helped [PRON:/ həlpt /] they're stigmatized [PRON: /stɪgmətəɪst/] and what's being done...nothing

JD: hm, mhm... well hopefully in the near future things will start to move [JN: hmm yes] forward hopefully, um about the the building grounds of the school back when you were teaching how is that compared to how it's standing and in condition today

JN: well i know at Cape Charles we were the school was right next to the dump Cape Charles dump it was only about uh few hundred feet to the west [PRON:/ wɛs /] ... and as far as there was a very limited amount of play ground very limited [JD: mhm] and uh we had uh we- we had uh May Day in which we had uh the students dress alike with uh the their uniforms on and wrapping the may pole and uh all of that those are things i remember distinctly the kids were always excited about [JD: yeah] yeah [JD: aw that sounds like fun] it was fun [LAUGH] and then i gue- really i there still a sense of Cape Charles they were like i said earlier they were very eager to ear- uh learn they were willing to do whatever they could uh to to help themselves and the parents were very cooperative and then like i said ch- churches oh dear if you needed a church [JD: CHUCKLE] and especially my uh first baptist they were always there for us

JD: er- you mentioned all the uniforms were the same on may day did they have uniforms they wore on a regular basis

JN: for May Day [JD: just for May Day] yeah just for May Day no we didn't have uniforms for regular basis

JD: okay, um with the churches and religion was religion a big aspect in the school environment itself

JN: oh yes [JD: yeah] oh yes definitely we we had devotions we- we had an auditorium [LAUGH] [JD: CHUCKLE] and we made use of it uh the students would assemble and a teacher would have one week and another teacher would have another week and they would get the students in their classroom to participate and then we'd have a Christmas play and what not and the kids would learn their parts oh it was exciting and then we had uh they would sing hymns uh you know we had a musician to come and help [JD: very cool] it it was just it was just exciting times yeah [JD: sounds like it]

JD: how were um what were the parents roles in in the students lives or in in the community surrounding the school

JN: well in Cape Charles you had a uh... group of uh blacks who were a little more advanced because there was a railroad there there were other types of jobs that were available and the living conditions were pl- uh a little better then uh in the uh rural [PRON: /ɹʌl] area so uh and there was people who lived there who uh receive
(20) social security and what not so they had pensions with the railroad and what not so that's where it was different

JD: with uh the railroad ive been noticing when i went over to the school you've gotta cross over the bridge [JN: yes] the hump as i'm i'm told it's called was that kind of how did that play a role in

JN: it's it's a the children just walked to school they came together [PRON: /tʃɛðə/] we didn't have no fights or nothing like that so the kids were just they were eager they were ready and the parents would send them regularly

JD: did they kind of help each other out a bit was there a sense of community where the children would uh have each other's backs [JN: oh yes definitely] yeah... [JN: yes] good <P: 04> with um teaching math were you teaching math when you were doing the fourth and fifth grade

JN: no no [JD: no] i mean i- i- was teaching math but i was teaching everything else [LAUGH] [JD: everything else LAUGH oh wow] yeah see because in fourth and fifth grade you had health [PRON: /helt /] geography and all that you know

JD: [YAWN] oh my goodness how was that kind of uh

JN: it was a challenge to me but with the because i was new [JD: mhm] uh but there were teachers there that were willing to help and then we had the supervisors i said earlier [PRON: /ə.ʃiə/] and she worked along with me i learned how to cut out letters [LAUGH] [JD: LAUGH there you go] from Al Brown yes shes the one who taught me how to cut the uh letter out for the bulletin board and i will never forget it

JD: oh i can remember those letters as an iconic memory of my own [JN: yeah LAUGH] [LAUGH] school experiences

JN: you had to fold em and cut em out yeah and then our Christmas time i always had time uh we gave little bags uh Id buy pecans [PRON:/ pikæns /] a orange or something like that for the students and they would look forward to that [JD: little Christmas goodie bags] yes good- goodie bags one student told me Mr. Nottingham looks like you counted every pecan [PRON:/ pikæns /] in the bag i said yeah i had to come out [INAUDIBLE] but i did that when i was in high school too at that middle school rather but like i said i- it- it w- it was it was in- interesting an uh interesting experience teaching in Cape Charles [JD: mhm] it was different from regular schools and you can see that by the way that they and the students did well oh yes we had some very outstanding students they were uh very intelligent and they respond well

and you can tell y- y- people like uh Diane Davis all of them th- th- they did well and uh they had another student was very, smart but he died uhh his name was William Perry smartest student i ever taught had some very good students uh im telling you it was w-w- i had my cousins Doug Hill-Sample im tryin to think of some of the other ones they've gone on and other things i had one student i really i had him in the fourth [PRON: /fɔ:f/] grade he couldn't even he count read too well he had bad eyes he needed glasses but he managed to do well but i had him also in the high school well middle school in eighth grade math he could solve a math problem better than those who could read well but he- he was good at it and uh n-now i see him he has a big time job in D.C. [JD: wow, wow] doin very well he was gifted in math... that's what he was

JD: that's one thing i am not [JN: LAUGH] i can tell you that

JN: i- i enjoyed my years of teaching math [JD: LAUGH] [LAUGH]

JD: probably could've helped me out some oh my math is not my strong suit [JN: (25) LAUGH yeah] what were um the holidays like around Cape Charles

JN: uh [SIGH] [JD: SIGH yeah] yeah holidays uh you know Halloween y- stuff were actually probably rough but uh otherwise it was pretty good but uh Christmas was good an uh because we gave Christmas plays and that was an activity, yeah, uh so and again the students and the churches and everybody participated and everybody came, uh i heard that i was uh what do you call it i uh mm-b- the lady told me that my mother w- took me to a baby contest <PRON: kantəs> at that school [JD: LAUGH] so when i was about less than a year old so she reminded me of that but you know i don't remember it [LAUGH] but that so that tells you something about the school itself

JD: [LAUGH] you won the cutest baby didn't you [JN: LAUGH i don't know about that] you won the cutest baby just say it you don't have to be modest [JN: LAUGH no, no] awe, what was your most memorable sort of holiday memory maybe with the kids

JN: [BREATH SIGH] the Christmas play singing of the Christmas carols [JD: yeah] yes that was that was the climax that was the exciting time and see how well they portrayed those parts...

JD: very good [JN: mhm] yeah <P: 07> what um impact of the schools closing in nineteen sixty-six when Northampton County consolidated the school system what kind of impact did that have on the community itself

JN: i really don't know exactly but i can tell you how i felt [JD: yeah] ... [SIGH] i thought that the uh by integrating the schools they would be more a uh, the schools would become more productive and i thought everybody was sincere in integrating

and doing what's right but i did not find that to be true, uhm, you know I've already said earlier that uh things were not like they should be at that time they were not... but if everything had been true to form you know it'd have been alright [JD: mhm] uh because you had the equipment the building the physical b- b- building itself is what made it better the the conditions of the buildings and being there in front of the students to marry with the tools

JD: um this may be a, fairly personal questions but was there any, overt hostility that you can remember that came with integration in- in the community like was it, a very difficult transition for Cape Charles

JN: well i don't know about Cape Charles i was in like i said i was in the county then [JD: yeah i suppose yeah] hmm [SIGH] there were none only thing i uh my experience uh i regret, the students that i taught and especially the European Americans they were very nice in the classroom... but when i saw them out on the street with their parents some of them were reluctant about speaking [JD: mm] but in the classroom they were totally different...

(30) JD: do you think that had to do with the respect level of teacher student [JN: do what] do you think like the- the role of teacher student had a big play in that where as they had uh the respect of [JN: yeah] showing to the teacher

JN: yeah, yeah but why not [JD: yeah, yeah that is strange] in public it is strange [JD: mm, hm, wow] [BACKGROUND THUMPING] <P: 08>

JD: was there um, a sort of...hub culture that was uhm associated with, the Rosenwald School community as opposed to uh separate from the Northhampton County community or the Cape Charles community kind of a different set of like i know you mentioned like the the school plays and they're a big part of what it was like but with um just kind of day to day goings about was there separate sort of culture associated with it-

JN: -well there was there was a separate type of culture in Cape Charles definitely because of the [SIGH] Cape Charles people [JD: mhm] and then it was incorporated in town yes it was they felt uh they felt they were different from just the students in the county

JD: how so do you think

JN: well they the closeness of the, of the well the closeness of the students all in the same area, they weren't uh they they lived close together [JD: mhm] they were all family 'n family connected... that's the only reason i can give

JD: mhm that's great... with uhm... kind of a off question but were there any sort of, major weather events that you can recall cause i know this is a coastal area so

JN: [SIGH] hmm... i seem to remember a uh hurricane coming through, there, and i think we had to get out early [JD: mhm] is all i can recall cause we had the laborious trees in the front yard [JD: mhm] in the front of the school...but...guess that's about it [JD: mhm, mm] mhm

JD: i know hurricanes cause problems over for me in Norfolk so [JN: oh yes, LAUGHTER] oh yeah [LAUGHTER] figured it had to cause some problems here too [JN: yes yes] [BACKGROUND LAUGHTER/BACKGROUND THUMPING] there wasn't any like damage to the school from hurricanes was there [JN: no mm-mm] that's good i guess with it being brick it can withstand a lot hm [JN: yeah LAUGH] yeah [LAUGH]

JN: matter a fact that was the only brick school that was built for, blacks in this area and the Rosenwald that's the other one yes the others were came from schools that they were used predominately by white [JD: oh wow] mhm especially Capeville which i um i went to my cousins for first second and third grade and forth grade i went to capeville and there i graduated there and went to the high school at that time uh that was the old high school and then we moved into the new buildin' in, nineteen fifty-four, nineteen fifty-three fifty-four, first graduatin' class from that school uh i was a part of it [JD: oh wow]

JD: very cool, do you think that was uh a different dynamic of the school system to when you were in school to when you were teaching, any sort of change...

(35) JN: you know schools are still evolving [JD: yeah] [LAUGHS] and and they have a long ways to go [JD: mhm] an i don't understand why s- uh you know we have hm, it's all political so we encumber the quality of schools t- [BEATH] it's something else, i could never understand why people in Loudon County got paid twice as much money as i was getting and i still don't and i uh i think that they're, also if you could teach if you a teacher of fifth graders or you teach in the elementary school that the pay salary- salary should be the same but that's not true and now were talking about these charter schools, uh, are we trying to get away from public school i-i-i really don't have the answer yet, but this this, our county has not supported public schools as it should have

JD: really

JN: oh yes [JD: how so] look at their priorities...they built the jail [LAUGH] and the courthouse and all of that those things seem to be important and they should not have been there should built the school first then built the [JD: mhm] jail and the courthouse and what not and social service building...

JD: yeah, yeah, i have to say ive got the same sort of problem in my uh my hometown [JN: oh yeah] with the new high school, know exactly what you're talking

about [JN: mm] um do you ever- do you still keep in contact with any of your students

JN: yes i uh hmm not anymore but when i was teaching uh my last years of teaching up til in the early eighties and nineties they would drop by and i see 'em occasionally now, but uh ,and i see them in churches 'n yeah i still see my students, because i [LAUGH] i see quite a few of them oh yes well 'n well the peninsula we [LAUGHTER] [JD: yeah LAUGHTER] we can run into each other anytime anyway [JD: yeah ha at some point] at some point yes uh uh that's that's the way it is

JD: anybody in particular maybe any favorites i promise i won't tell [LAUGH] [JN: oh no LAUGH nah uh no on] not gonna go there...alright fair enough, i figured it was worth a short

JN: no i'm not goin' there [JD: LAUGH] no no no [JD: alright i can't say i blame you mm]

JD: if there was something that you'd like to see done, with the efforts in preserving everything with the Rosenwald School what would you like to come out of it

JN: i to [SIGH] uh... well the Rosenwald School and i don't know what will be able but we need a building and that i know if it's gonna be that building to house Afro-American heritage and culture activities, and we need something, because th-th-theres i mean my family there's quite a bit, and i uh we need we need to document this for the next generations os much has been lost uh even from Africa [JD: mhm] and so much was destroyed that we you know [PHONE DING] we never get- get a chance to visualize some of the things that happened [JD: mhm] so i'd like to see and uh they talk they uh workin' on one in Washington, D.C. to yes i do know about that but i need i'd like to see something here <PRON: hiə>, i want- i will be talking to some people about that mhm it's got to it's got to happen, we don't want to lose our...history <PRON: hɪstɪ> ...because we do have a history <PRON: hɪstɪ> [JD: mhm] and you don't want to evolve into another culture, another race, culture you want to maintain our own and that's the thing that's the way it should be and they erase it everywhere you go they do that, the Indians the uh Egyptians... it should be something to give you s -a sense of pride, and that's the way it should be

(40)

JD: absolutely, absolutely [JN: mhm] if you had any uh something that you wanted to pass on about the history to the next generation-

JN: -i have quite a bit [JD: well let's hear it] i have uh well i'm talking about things i have collected <PRON: kələktɪt> over the years [JD: yeah] i have uh boxes of things [JD: yeah] i want to- to organize and put in some type of s-...order [HANDS RUBBING TOGETHER] that they can be seen by others so i- i - that's what i'm doin, and i will do it mhm, uh it's something that we're working on [JD: very good] i know Dr. Carter had mentioned something to me yeah about that

JD: mhm any specific artifacts

JN: [DEEP BREATH] woo hmm i have hmm slave records i have uh [MOUTH CLICK] uhh, i have my aunts original picture that's not the original there <PRON: ðεə> that's halled in the school an' i gotta get that fixed uh, what else do i have delores uh i have uh i can trace my family [WHISPER JD to DN: you can talk] all the way back to the uh eighteen hundreds uh eighteen eighteen thirties, uh i have that

DN: and stories from when my father was a slave lived on the uh-uh was a young boy 'n he had this over-seer an' the stoires that they would tell us about him and he was sort of a uh-um like a-a-a like a little pet uh i guess and people that we knew from long time ago just we been here a long time you somebody from my family always been here so [JD: mhm] and we been in this house all the time just been just one family that's lived in this house all this time and so we go back a long ways and they have uh we definitely have history [JN: mhm] as i say whenever i find something he collects it [JD: LAUGHTER] [JN: LAUGHTER] [DN: LAUGHTER] and he keeps it so he has a lot of that 'n he collects it he's a big collector you see and he collects artifacts and he collects blue stuff and, all around you can see this all this glass and so uh it's- it's- it's -it's interesting when we talk about the things of the past and do-

JN: -see you also have two uh we have Mary Nottingham Smith which is my father's sister and the schools in named- she started a school in Accomack, we also have a uh great uncle on my my grandfather's brother <PRON: brəðə> on my mother's side [JD: mhm] who mm was the- founded a school in Delrey Beach Florida w- uh- it's Solomon D Spady school and it was they say it w- they turned his house into a museum but now- i i'm hearing lately i haven't been down there yet but i'm gonna go down they - they made some changes they alterned some of the content [DN: they made it a community center] made a community center

DN: mhm but it still has all of the things that they kept from him and the name is still the same in the, down in Delrey Beach [JD: wow, wow] [JN: mhm] yeah my father did uh uh worked for the government in training a lot of the uh carpenters on the Eastern Shore [JN: yeah] [JD: oh wow] and so he used to have a list uh a list n' do but they were all up and down the Shore yeah and he had to submit reports i remember his sittin' down [JN: oh yes] and doin' those reports for them

JD: big family impact then yeah, absolutely

(45) JN: let's see my grandmother who she lived to be a hundred and nineteen a hundred and sixteen something like that [JD: oh my gracious] yeah but she was a she was in- in slavery but she was able to learn by 'cause she escorted the children of her master to school and w-w- she stood in the back of the room and she learned <PRON: lərnt> and then she would go home and write on the ground what she had learned

that's how she taught her children [JD: that's incredible] that was my great grandmother

DN: teachin's always been in our family you- anywhere you go uh- i guess we realize the importance of an education [JD: mhm] and it was necessary at that time so they just- it was something that was instilled [JN: mhm] in our family it was something that you had to do

JD: that's beautiful, to have a family love for it like that

JN: oh yes, nothin' like my family [LAUGHTER]

JD: [LAUGHTER] i can see that, you said that the original picture of your aunt was hanging in the school-

JN: -no that's not the original that's a copy [JD: but you have the original-] the original's upstairs i want it it uh needs some uh restoration work done to it because it was it w- the uh climate in the school by being closed for so long made a few uh errors no uh- marks on the you know uh [JD: mhm]-

DN: but it was hanging in the Mary Nottingham Smi-Smith's school in Accomack when i graduated [JD: oh wow] [JN: mhm] so they closed the school and so uh we received the portrait

JD: that's incredible [BACKGROUND AUDIO]

JN: okay [JD: mhm] i-

LS: -when you were talking about the portrait i- i should have actually changed the way the c- camera was so that we could focus on that so i- i don't know if we could repeat that a little bit [JN: LAUGHTER] that'- that's uhi know that's not really the cool thing to do and all-

JD: we could just zoom in on it now

JN: j- take uh, yeah

LS: uh, but, [BACKGROUND AUDIO] i just won't have the words...this thing uh okay [LAUGH] i s- i have- i'll have it i'll have still photos too of him as well you know that will be still photos [JD: mhm] anyway alright... [WHISPER] sorry

JD: it's alright...so with your with your aunt she was- the picture was hanging in the in the school-

DN: -yes the Mary Nottingham Smith school in Accomack county that's where when she came from us she because a dean supervisor and she was down in Alabama and [JN: Louisiana] Louisiana and they called her uh back home an' sh-she was on her-

on her way back to work and she had saw a premonition that she was needed at home and and when she was on a train on her way down and so after that year she came back home and she stayed here and taught down in Townsend for a couple of years and then uh was the superintendent for Accomack asked her to come back and be the uh [JN: mhm dean mm] head of the supervisors for the black schools so she went on up there and th- that was the first black school that it uh consolidated i should say black today first high school uh that they had up there n' it's named after her

JD: wow

JN: but she actually had to go out and campaign and raise money for that school [DN: yeah so], so she was actively involved in the building on that first school building brick by brick

DN: yeah she she got people to give money uh farmers gave money uh plants and foods [JN: yeah] and they sold 'em they sold bricks [JN: mhm] they had sale ons they- small four room and one room schools would compete with eachother [JD: LAUGH] they'd have a big sale-on [JN: mhm] and you know people gave money that way so everybody had a little bit in it [JD: mhm]

JD: so then was there not as much community support as there was in uh [JN: no] in Northampton and Cape Charles

JN: well uh not- not so much th-th-the community support that existed before [JD: mhm] is not here now

JD: oh really

DN: there was great community support in Northampton also see Northampton students like my mother and a few others before my brother and them went to private school and where my mother went to Tidewater which is ten- fifteen miles up the road and uh my father went to Hampton cause that was like the high school Hampton- knowin' him he said he went to school his mother mailed him some money i think she mailed him twenty cent two dimes taped to a piece of paper and he thought he had lots a money [JD: awh] and so it- it- it- uh the thing- the times that we are in but the African American carried on the uh Tidewater Institute for a long time [JN: yeah] i think it was only closed in mm nineteen thirty or so something like that

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JN: yeah thirty-six thirty-seven something like that- th-th- thirty-six

JD: wow

DN: and we have uh we have the uh Northampton county high school alumni association which is a group of African Americans who carry on the county <PRON:

kani> history and tidewater we actually have a mixed both of the g-groups together and we do scholarships each year for the students graduatin' from the high school and we try- try- try to help to promote their uh their education as much as we can-

JD: -absolutely a tradition [DN: yes, mhm] of carrying on education

JN: but it's the sad part about it the students that we have an they graduate say in June [JD: mhm] which they do, but alls they're lookin' for's a job or <PRON: a:> school somewhere else and they don't come back

DN: so we on a champagne [JN: LAUGH] to every retiree we see cause all of our frien- most of our friends we were like only a few of us are left here most of our friends went away to work cause they had no wh- no job and they went away to school and they didn't come back still cause they needed somewhere to work and they graduated high school some of 'em left the next day to try [JN: mm yeah] and get a job and so our students scattered out all over in California [JN: mhm] in New York 'n when you go places we usually see somebody that we know

JD: wow

JN: oh yeah they're contributing to other communities [DN: mhm] and that's what's happening...as opposed to here

JD: as opposed to filtering back

DN: and we're tellin' all the retirees to come on home we need ya home [LAUGH] we're trying to entice all of 'em to come back [JN/JD: LAUGH]

JN: boy they're comin' back too if you listen to some of the chatter that's goin' on around in this community uh it's not gonna be a wholesome situation

JD: why not

JN: ooh uh people have different ideas about like i said- i said earlier people are selfish [JD: mhm] and they concerned about themselves [JD: yeah]... so us that's happening though uh the Whitehouse on down [LAUGH]

JD: well clearly not everyone's selfish and concerned about themselves i mean look at your family, your family's doing everything to help the community [JN: oh no] and pass on knowledge

DN: no my brother was the one- uh one of the few to start uh district one community action group and uh district one community action group we're now five-oh-one-C-three group an' we did we right now we're working on with the planning group of Northampton to get houses- improving houses in Fairview and [JN: Culls] Culls we're now in Culls which is supposedly the cheap side and they started because the water used to be stayin' along the roads and uh people couldn't

get out and there was a blockage up there and a blockage uh just over on uh the cheap side of the blockage downtown so you be in and the water would be standing and in people's houses and stuff and so this is the way the group started and Mr. Nottingham was one of the ones who helped start it [JN: can't afford] vaccines and Lola Brown [JN: she's diseased] and uh

JN: got Daniel Marks well we started the group j-j-just to help people and most of 'em wanted to retain their homes you know who uh don't have the money to keep pay their taxes w-we 've lost a lot of land and then we they don't know how to leave the property, too many of them leave property with four or five people but you can't do that it's not gonna work [JD: hm]...yeah so and then somebody and then you get four five people involved in some property and then somebody say oh well i'm not gon' worry about it what do you do, and then th-that next person say you see they not gonna pay the taxes <P: 04> cause they have so little, plus the people who own land who are heired to land don't live here, [JD/DN: yeah], and they're trying to make a living placed in the community where they are [JD: mhm]...and not thinking about coming back

(55) DN: but we're working on it [LAUGH] [JD; LAUGH] we're working on it that one- uh just one advocates for uh the people in the community we work to try to get them uh back into people's houses and uh cause of taxes 'n stuff and try to uh go and as i sai- we goin' do about getting and paying it off and uh how to get the housing and move and uh w- sponsor the Nottinghams had the first community group that used to come here from this colleges

JN: yeah William and Mary the first community group came from William and Mary in ninety two [JD: hmm] mhm [DN: n' they were part of the community] most mhm

DN: they come to work in the community- they paid to come and work in the community [JN: yes] i think they used to house them in family homes [JN: yes] you know of the Shore you know they volunteer and the children would stay in the African American comes and then they would go out and then we finally got some of the hotels let the kids stay- n' they enjoyed comin' here [JD: LAUGH hm] cause they get to stay in hotels but uh Nottingham go out and find places for 'em to stay it was uh uh it was rewarding work i remember and standin' along the road we'd pick up all the paper and stuff along the road we'd do anything anybody asked us to do

JN: man houses painted and structures we put up uh, uh steps you know things that we could do but we never could find a skilled person to because students don't know anything about uh working the uh sc- construction [JD: mhm] yeah carpentry some of 'em have a hammer in they hand [JD: yeah] [LAUGH] which you already know [JD: yeah yeah] but the- the- the- they did very well and i was very proud of the students-

DN: they were very nice [JN: very nice, mhm] too very active n-n they would do anything you asked them to do and we always and uhm we talked about our oral history <PRON: hɪstə.ɪ> things like that mm and we took 'em 'round in the communities and they worked they worked hard diligently...

JD: that's-

DN: the last group we had was from Holy Cross [JN: all of them- oh that was the last group] [LS: Holy Cross that's quite a way] yes Holy Cross they drove down in vans [JN: blue vans] yes blue vans ten groups

JN: oh the last fifteen or twenty were Holy Cross

DN: we just didn't have one last year [JN: oh no] was the first time in all those years because Nottingham was sick Mr. John Green was sick uh Bill Houston he used to help us our sometimes and he [JN: he lost his wife- his wife was sick at that time] lost his wife- his wife was sick and so last year i-i-i be only one standin' on the roads pickin' up papers [LAUGH]

JD: awh [LAUGH] bless your heart

END 57:28