

Valentine Evans

Attended 1955 - 1960

Valentine Evans (VE)

Erin Finn (EF)

Linda Schulz (LS)

... Looking at photographs.

VE: What I like about that one is it's in Washington and they're looking at the Vietnam wall. See that lady in the red dress -- that's me.

EF: ok. We're recording. Ms. Valentine Evans, do you have any.... You attended the school and were there when before it was integrated or..

VE: I attended the school in 1955. I came to the Eastern Shore from Hampton VA in August of 1955 and I became a 3rd grade student and I found it to be interesting because I had come from a school that had 3 classrooms for the 1st and 2nd grade prior to me coming to the Shore, and when I got to the Eastern Shore, the 3rd and the 4th grade were in the same room. and Miss Janice Joynes was my teacher. So I found it to be interesting that also when we went to the 5th grade, 6th grade you had the same teacher In the 7th grade. I graduated from the school in 1960 and I went to Northampton High school.

EF: And you said your grandfather came down with

VE: I was born in Hampton Virginia. My father's native home is Hampton. My mother and father met in Norfolk because he was a sailor and they got married and moved to Hampton. We lived there until I was 8. I found out in 2012 that my father's grandfather, Robert Elliot, had been a worker for the Fort Monroe and he also worked in Hampton Institute as a janitor. His prior history was that he had lived around Williamsburg and he came from a slave plantation and he followed the soldiers down to Fort Monroe. In a book called 'Weavers of the Wheat' he said he was born about 1849, and it was documented in 1937. Someone did an interview for grandfather and he said he was born about 1849, lived on a plantation. Whoever inherited his family as slaves kept them all intact in the same plantation because it was the master's will that they not be separated. So he had a knowledge of his sisters and brothers. And that's why that side of my family is intact because they weren't separated. and I find it to be amazing that we can carry our family back to the 1800s.

EF: Cause most people can't.

VE: That was my father's father, Robert Elliot. My grandfather's name was John Taylor Elliot.

EF: This was your father's grandfather, your great grandfather.

EF: So what do you remember about the school. Do you remember when it changed.

VE: When the school changed. Well I went to the school it was all black kids. and it was just different for me because it had radiator heat, wooden floor, 2 people at a desk. Graduated in 1960 from elementary school. and I graduated from high school in 1965. I went through the 8th grade at the high school I went 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th, over to

EF: Was it a hard transition?

VE: Yes, because where I lived prior I had to walk about half a block to the school but when I got to the Shore we lived on Plum St which is 2 streets over and we had to walk from Plum Street to Nectarine Street, go down all the way to the end of the street where Pomoco Ford, where the motor registration was, we had to walk from there, cross the street, go down a block and go up a trestle to get up to the hump. and walk all the way down the slope to the school.

EF: That was a long walk.

VE: We did that. The only time we caught a ride was when it was raining but in all other weather we walked. We walked. and the most marvelous part about it. No one was hurt.

EF: Your talking train trestle right?

VE: The train was below us. The trains were below us. We had to walk up the steps, was a lot of steps there. The steps are gone. But it was like three sections of steps with railings. You walk maybe about 7 or 8 more, then there was a landing, then you walk a little bit more there was another landing until you got to the top of it. But there was never an incident. I even was a patrolman, watch the kids when they came off the hump steps and got down to Mason Street. We had to guide 'em across the street. We had patrolmen. We had badges, patrolman badges.

EF: So did you go with white children at all?

VE: Never.

EF: So all through high school.

VE: All through high school.

EF: Did you go past any higher education or ...

VE: No.

EF: So the community here -- is it -- I grew up in Charleston -- pretty split. Is it like that here?

VE: Not for me. ok. The difference in me and a lot of people from the Eastern Shore is that when I lived in Hampton, I knew a lot of professional black people. Maybe it was because of the Hampton Institute environment. But I knew a black journalist, I knew a black dentist, I knew a black undertaker with a big big under taker place. Black people had businesses, and they were doing well. I didn't ever interact with white people until I went to church, which I am a Catholic. I'm a Catholic but it never bothered me you know because I was always treated nice. Even when I was traveling on the ferry. A little girl, I would go in to the white section of the boat. I was

never pushed out. I was never pushed out. I was just treated like a little girl. Come in little girl, want some popcorn or something. That's the way it was. I never had those problems, never.

EF: And here, did you ever have them here either?

VE: I take care of myself. I don't have problems like that. Because I know who I am and I love(?) me. I'm not bigoted or nothing like that. I'm just down to earth and I love people.

EF: So what's your favorite part of the Eastern Shore in comparison to Hampton.

VE: What I loved about the Eastern Shore was the rural part of it in a sense. . where I have done field work to help my mother because there was a lot of children. But I also have had jobs outside of that kind of work. In fact I worked at the town of for 27 years. I started out doing the benefit work but I did DMV work for 16 years. Titles, registration, I did titles and registration. I sent the work to the bigger offices and they sent the titles back to the people. But I waited on a lot of people, I put a lot of tags on trucks, cars, in my lifetime.

EF: So you were showing me your pictures.

VE: yes, this picture was taken when I was about 2 years old. Lady holding the baby is my mother. Little girl -- that's my oldest sister and my father is over here, and this lady standing beside my mother is my godmother. We were being baptized. It's the Catholic Church. and it's the same ? in Newport News.

EF: You can tell it's a good mix of, you know, all the people

VE: I may not be saying the right words but I don't know what prejudice is like.

EF: So you raised your family here and did they stay here or ...

VE: My son right there in that picture with his family. That's the captain.

EF: Yes, I see the bars.

VE: Both he and his wife are in the military. . .She's a warrant officer.

EF: So you didn't go to school when it was integrated but did your grandchildren?

VE: Yes, my children and grandchildren also.

EF: Was that hard for them.

VE: Oh, no. No we have always been a ???

EF: Were the schools better? You're saying when you went to school...

VE: Everybody pulled together. There were PTA meetings. We went to the PTA meetings, band concerts. We had bake sales and everybody pulled together. And in fact Ms. Pruitt that lives

down on Tazewell Avenue had children same age as my sons, Brown and Byron, and raining, she picked my kids up and bring them home out of the rain, and never had no problems.

EF: What's your favorite memory of school.

VE: My favorite memories -- every day we had devotions. And we had to read the scripture in public schools over to and . . . the Rosenwald. We had devotions every morning. Everybody had to attend devotions, and if the scripture was read we sang songs and then we went to our classes. Another highlight I like -- if the weather was favorable we played jump rope during recess. We had wiener roast at the end of school year. Everybody brought a coat hanger, and hot dogs were provided. May Day, we had May days. We wrapped around the flag pole. We had square dances. That was a highlight and I would like to see this happen over there on those grounds. Even though I may not be a participant so much as an observer, I would like to see them to have a May Day in honor of that old school. They don't do that any more. Because it was just a very festive occasion, like if the girls that were wrapping the poles all had on the same color skirts, same color blouses, mostly there were white tee shirts. But they would have like a peach colored skirt or a blue skirt or whatever. and the maypole ribbons were matching the colors of the .. then people go under and out. I enjoyed that. We played basketball out on where we had our ceremonies, we had basketball goals, we had recess, we played basketball, we played volleyball, Never had I been ...we had plays... plays where you remember lines, tell stories. I was always active in that. Different kind of plays like, just a play maybe for the season. It was very interesting to be a part of. We had Christmas, Christmas pageant.

We had talent shows. They were always wonderful, and when they had Parent Teachers Association [meetings] majority of the parents went, and they all walked over to the school and they showed their children's support. Favorable weather of course.

LS: So the school was really kind of the heart of the community.

VE: Yes, the heart of the community. The school is still interesting, but it's been sold on a business, but the memories are there.

LS : And the new school. Did the kids go to that?

VE: Yes and the children that go to those schools have to ? a different way. I can't... prejudice, not in my life. I've always been myself.

EF: Do you have any children

VE: I have 3 sons. My oldest son died in '96 at 28 years old, and my daughter is 43 years old. She went to integrated school. My son in that picture, he went to integrated schools. His twin brother Byron went to the integrated schools. I have 3 surviving children.

EF: Were their friends white and black?

VE: Mixed, yes mixed.

LS: People went over to each others houses and it didn't matter?

VE: The twins, they were always invited to go to play with their classmates.And some man on the Cape Motel there would call and drive my children, they go to church....they take that's the way it was.

EF: Where was the ?

VE: Right here, and she is my white friend still.

EF: Nice that the community supports each other.

VE: Because we were taught. people just people .

EF: By parents?

VE: Grandparents too . and we were never allowed to talk about our teachers. Oh no. I don't care what they did. No bad mouth. You sit around tables, you this teacher did that....that was a no no.

EF: So how did you meet your husband?

VE: While working. We both were working in a restaurant. He was a cook and I was a waitress.

EF: And you guys had to stay here?

VE: Well, he had been away. He had been in the army also. He was working in Colonial Williamsburg and I was still here. I was already here and I was working at America House which is now Sunset Beach restaurant. Well years ago that was owned by Richmond Hotel Corporation. It was a big thing during those days. In fact, when I was across the Bay yesterday I saw the old Chamberlain Hotel which was a part of the Richmond Hotel. It's a retirement home now. But when I was working for them they had a Williamsburg Motor Inn, they had the Chamberlain, they had the John Marshall and all these other. They were big, big time. That was my first real big job working in a hotel and I was counter girl then and from that I became a waitress and did that for 10 years. Then I did day care for about a year, then I worked for the town of ... I stayed with them for 7 years till my health failed.

EF: And sisters?

VE: I have 10

EF: All here?

VE: No. Most of them went away. I have 3 brothers here and the rest of my family is away.

EF: Spread out? Stayed In the south or ...

VE: Our family is very interesting. My mother has a sister that works for the state of Florida, and her husband was a foreign agent, the legionnaire people, they go to Africa and all that stuff.

EF: Like Doctors without Borders kind of thing?

VE: His service is State Department so like a foreign legion or something. Yea, that's it. So anyway she married this guy. They went to college together. She went to ?? , Africa and all these other places and now she lives in Washington. I had 2 sisters over in Washington. I have a sister in Portsmouth. I had a sister in Virginia Beach and a sister in Reston, Virginia. They are all around and like I was telling, you know, I went over to Miss ?'s house. I don't feel like I'm ... People are like them and I get to go. It's like yesterday I want to get some stuff from the store, I wind up in Hampton looking around, taking pictures of their old clock at Hampton Institute and the old fort, taking pictures of the old fort. I love history. So at some point in time if someone can develop those pictures for me.

EF: So sounds like you have good friends to help you with that.

VE: I do. Because those 2 children ... they went into the post office in ... They were thrill at the sign on the wall about what to do in case of an emergency. That yellow and black sign in the post office.

EF: For earthquake? Oh, for fallout shelter.

VE: Their dad has taken them just about anywhere he can think of. They've spent over there in Germany. They're around 9 countries surrounding Germany. They've been to all of them.

EF: Well, that's good.

VE: And my son has given me 2 trips to California. They live in Elkhorn ??? and I been there twice. I went 1999 and 2005. And by the trip I got pictures to show where I've been. Cause I've been to Tiawana twice. I get to go.

EF: Good. Good to be a wanderer.

VE: I've been To Boston twice.

EF: What's the favorite place that you've found?

VE: The thing about Boston that I really wanted to do and I never been to the Boston harbor. But I did the last time, I did get a opportunity to [go to] Salem. The bus we were on we took my sister, her husband's family, they had a weekend in Boston and in the rain and we couldn't go to a lot of places ... and we wound up in Salem.

EF: Did you look around or was it too rainy.

VE: It was too bad. We stayed in ? I been in ... a lot of little places outside ... part of Boston. Never to the harbor and I always wanted to go to that. It is on my list. I found when I went to California the last time, I went to Minneapolis afterwards and I was so intrigued because they had so many stores in there.

EF: In the airport? Yea, there's a lot, it's like a city.

VE: Yes, It's like a city within ?. I couldn't tell anybody...because there was so .. sandwiches about 12 dollars. I maybe haven't done anything but I have.

EF: So, was it different for your kids. Was their school experience different because the schools were integrated. Your experience going with only black kids. You think that affected the way they ?

VE: One thing. We always tell our children .. and no black children, no white children. They're children. That's what we've been taught. That's what we teach. It's nothing different from them. We know how that goes. and then there are people there I know that don't accept me. Don't get me wrong but I know the difference. I know my family. Some people are just not worth it.

I go to church with some people that don't want to shake my hand. That's ok. Have a good day anyway. I don't even tell you. I don't even think ...things like that. and move on.

EF: Your family's Catholic.

VE: My mother and family [sisters and brothers] lived here in ... They had a lot of children and my grandfather told them, let me take 2 of your children to help you out. That was during the depression. My mother and her sister stayed [with their grandparents who] raised them in Norfolk. Sent them to Catholic school and as a result my mother became Catholic. So in the old days, if you were Catholic everybody in the family became Catholic. So that when she married my father he had to become Catholic too. And the children therefore had to become Catholic. Well, not everybody remained Catholic, I'm just one of the few that remained Catholic. So eleven children all living.

EF: So even those that weren't sent to Catholic school became Catholic?

VE: I've never been to Catholic school. My mother went to Catholic school. My mother's mother was Baptist so my mother's children are half Catholic and half Baptist. 5 are Baptist and 6 are Catholic.

EF: Did your mom ????

VE: She's the oldest.

EF: Where did she get [her learning] ?

VE: I don't understand it. My mother and grandmother they probably had an 8th grade education. But they were sharp. My grandmother could read, write, write plain. She went to the Tidewater Institute that was up in Chesapeake. My grandmother went there. Mother went to the Catholic school. And one day, about 3 years ago, I said ma, ma you had to be smart in school I said, for the things that you had taught us. She used to read to us. About the encyclopedia... I had a book ...the Wonder Book they were called. She brought out a set of the Wonder Books. My father was a postman in Hampton and he lost his job through ? and that's the reason why we had to move to the Shore.

EF: Going to school doesn't necessarily make you smart. And not going to school doesn't necessarily mean you're not smart. Your grandmother and your mother were obviously very smart. Maybe didn't have the opportunity.

VE: They both....my grandmother got married when she was 15. My mother got married when she was 14. When they learned, they learned. and they had something to offer their children. A lot. Cause I could read at an early age. They used to sit out on the porch with us with the funny papers – Dick Tracey ... and I heard so much about it I could repeat and also following the pictures. And everybody thought I was reading it cause I remember what they said.

EF: Cause someone was reading them to you?

VE: Yes. Like that little girl on Foreign[?] House. ... Not that one, the one on Four[?] House, Mary Kay Olson. I had an open mind to learning and my mother would read to me and how my father [read] the series to her, and she was excited about it. She put the paper down, I go right and get the paper and start doing and seem like she had read it.

EF: So you still like to read?

VE: hum. Not so much. I do more listening because my eyesight is dim. I have no peripheral vision. So I do read, but a certain technique I have to do to read. Very important when I do read, I try .. Focusing is hard, but ok I'm not going cry.

EF: What's your favorite part about this town.

VE: The favorite part about the town? You know it took people that moved to the town to get me to appreciate what they saw. They saw things that I didn't. They see the waterfront. I didn't. I knew it was there, I just didn't appreciate it. And I knew the sun was shining. I'm glad of it. People come here just to see the sun go down on the water or see the sun going down over on this end of the town. I took it for granted. Yes. Family together. I had my family, yea and I do thank ...the community and I'm happy about that. I love going to church. I'm happy about that, but the natural resources I never ... it's too cold, it's too hot, whatever. Never really. It took people from out of the way and show me what we really had here.

EF: Did you swim a lot when you were younger?

VE: No. No.

EF: So you didn't use the beach.

VE: No. I love seafood.

EF: That's good.

VE: I'm not ? league swimmer.

EF: So do you have more than just those 2 grandchildren?

VE: I have 5.

EF: What's the age range?

VE: 25, 21, 13, 12, and 16. The girl is 16. There's 4 boys. The girl in the picture, she's 16. Her name is Gabriella, they call her Gaby. And this is the same family, just earlier.

EF: And you said they are in Germany now.

VE: They're in Germany. Byron is the ODU. Tiyvon graduated from Virginia State University and Brian was 12 so he's still in 5th grade, 6th grade, Kiptopeke. He's in 6th grade.

EF: So you had twin boys.

VE: Byron is in Prince George, Virginia.

EF: But you also have a grandson named Byron.

VE: My husband just had a defibrillator put in in August. We have really been on the run this spring. We have been to Hampton VA I know, we've been in Richmond 4 times, He had to have surgery over at McGuire's. He has to go over there and have this defibrillator checked out. I don't like going on the run cause medical.

EF: Is the defibrillator better?

Husband: yes

EF: ... So do people come home to visit?

VE: We meet at Virginia Beach. Everybody, about 80 people. We go to this place near Burton Station and meet there. Everybody pay \$15 apiece. Pay for the place and bring food and have a good time.

I'm trying to figure the age. My mother was born in 1930. She would be 83 this month if she was. She died in 2012.

EF: So you're saying that the school that you went to before you came here. The school had wooden floors and had...

VE: It didn't have wooden floors. The school here in ... had wooden floors. They threw green pine looking stuff on the floor to clean it. I never saw that. [in the old school] we had like linoleum and stuff for floor.

EF: So was it A dirt floor?

VE: Wooden. Here in ... was wooden.

EF: What about the one you went to before, the one across the Bay.

VE: That was they had single desks and something like linoleum on the floors.

EF: ok. One desk for everybody?

VE: One desk for everybody.

EF: Heat?

VE: Heat. Cause see like where I lived, we had gas, city gas.

EF: So that school was better quality than the one here?

VE: Yea. Hampton was a more progressive area than the Eastern Shore.

EF: And Eastern Shore had wood floors. Was it radiator heat?

VE: Radiator heat.

EF: What about the teachers. Were the teachers high school graduates or were they.

VE: They were college graduates.

EF: Were the teachers mostly from the area? Or did they come in from like up north or out west.

VE: Mrs. Joynes, I'm sure was from the area. Ms. Alice Ames the 1st and 2nd grade teacher was from the area. Mr. Monroe, at the time he was the principal and 6th and 7th grade teacher, he was from the area also. After Mr. Monroe left Mr. Jesse Hare came from North Carolina. He was ... 5th, 6th, and 7th grade teacher. He was also principal.

EF: So well prepared teachers.

VE: Yea. Well prepared. John Nottingham came in later years, Alice Brown came in later years. Charles Bell's wife came. They were not initially here when I first came here in the school system, but they came to the school system while I was there.

EF: So the schools closed 6 years after you graduated when the schools were melded and consolidated together. What was the impact of that school closing?

VE: A lot of people embraced that.

EF: You weren't upset?

VE: No. They were glad to get closer. But even though when I was going to school they didn't have a school bus to take the children to the school. I walked, and that's in inclement weather. But in later years they had a bus to take the kids to school.

EF: Prior to the integration. So as far as your family there was not any issue in integration. It was fine.

VE: Right

EF: Do you know were there families in the town white or black who were upset that they were integrating.

VE: I'm not aware.

EF: So there wasn't any ... like Georgia, and it wasn't like any of the states where you had state troopers. Nobody fought it.

VE: No. Nothing like that.

EF: What was the school like, the buildings and the grounds, what were they like before when you were there. As opposed to now. You said now a company owns the school.

VE: Well, they had a sidewalk that led from the entrance to the roadway. and that's what we played hop scotch on. The rest of it was just grass. But the only thing, just about going to school over there, the school was right there in front of the dump, the city dump. and at times you could smell it. That's the only thing. But other than that it was, you know, nice. It was different, but nice. But what I was trying to say, in Hampton we had city gas, electric, bath tub, all that stuff. Like here in the Eastern Shore, half of the people didn't have indoor plumbing. Our grandparents was one of them. We had our bathroom? door attached to the back of the house. Also we had running water in the kitchen, had a sink in the house. But we also had outside faucets on the outside of the house. They were like in the middle of part of the doorway[?]. We had wiring in the downstairs part of the house that had that wired up to the upstairs part of the house. My grandmother did have a refrigerator and she did have an electric stove. All good stuff and like there comparing the 2 cities. The people here, some of them were still using oil lamps. Half the people didn't even have a telephone. My Grandmother did though. I can remember her phone number was 694. So they didn't have 7 numbers like they have now, they had 3 numbers.

EF: So your grandmother had running water, refrigerator, telephone, electric stove. But there were a lot of people that were still using oil lamps. Had no electricity. Amazing. How long did it take for the whole state to be...

VE: Gradually people started better jobs, going to the city, getting jobs.

EF: Your mother was born during the depression.

VE: Yes. 1930

EF: And was it just that her husband had a better job or ...

VE: My grandfather worked for the railroad, he throwed lines out to the boats coming in for the railroad, and he also cleaned the office of ?? C&P Telephone Company.

EF: And this is not the grandfather that came down from ...

VE: That's not Robert. Herbert Bland is my mother's father.

EF: Robert's your great grandfather. Robert is grandfather in Hampton, Robert Elliott.

VE: And this grandfather is the grandfather here, on the Eastern Shore side. My mother's father.
Herbert Bland: B L A N D.

EF: So he worked for the railroad and the telephone company. So what are some of the jobs that your, you said one of your sisters went to college.

VE: Grata went to the university, the school in Princess Anne, Maryland.

EF: And her husband was the one who worked for the AID?

VE: un, un. Hazel, my mother's sister, Hazel, Tom's father's sister, her husband was the one who worked for the AID.

EF: And did she go to college too?

VE: The state university.

EF: So your brothers and sisters, what do they do?

VE: My sister Carla worked for Sentara Norfolk General Dietary Department. My sister Miss Sharon worked for international bank better known as Sovern, better known as Bank of America. She worked with computers, and Gerald of course worked for the town of [Cape Charles] in the public works department. I worked at the town doing domestic and DMV work, and my brother Rodney? he worked, more or less moved furniture ... for people and do different things. Grata has worked for 8th Street Projects. She knows how to do grants and stuff. Colleen works for um um.. she worked there for about a year but she got a good job in Reston. What she does is like where someone has an insurance claim they call... .it's a good... Jimmy, my brother, he's kind of like that problem ... he's got mental problems. He doesn't hold down a job, but he's not harmful, he's not rowdy?, very sweet person. We all look out for him. We all love him. We all take care of him.

EF: and close friends too?

VE: He's never been able to hold down a job. . . He's the 3rd child.

EF: Where are you?

VE: Number 2.

EF: So There's Carla, then you, then Jimmy, and then 7 others.

VE: My sister worked for La timore???

EF: Did all of your brothers and sisters go to Cape Charles Elementary?

VE: Stopped with Gerald. Gerald was the last one because ...Carla went there, Jaime went there, I

went there, Randy? went there so forth. Deborah went to ...My sister Debra she used to do restaurant work, she also did front desk work.

EF: When you went to school did you perceive if it was ... separate but not equal. The white kids, their school, was it better quality?

VE: Looked like the white children had more fun. We used to walk by there. They had a lot of spirit. And that's one thing that intrigued me when I went to work. My first years working as a DMV person, I worked in the town offices down town. But then I went to the school. I worked 9 years in the town office and 7 at the school. And I used to walk around that school and I said, oh boy, look at the lovely thing here. I could just feel it, how those faces of the kids when they were going to school there. They had their home coming, Thanksgiving day, and all. It was just a lot of togetherness.

EF: So when they integrated . . . do you think the kids at your school were at a disadvantage in comparison to the white kids?

VE: No. because we had our own feel on how we were going to do projects and things. I think we did what we had with our limitations. We didn't know anything you know, just like if you've never been exposed to something you just don't miss what you never had.

EF: So you worked at the Cape Charles [High] School [the old white school]

VE: I had an office run out of there.

EF: Were the facilities different, were they better?

VE: It was kind of run down.

EF: Cape Charles School?

VE: I had the front part with the office

EF: While the kids were still there?

VE: No. There were no children there.

EF: I'm talking about in the time when the children were there.

VE: No. I never worked there when the children were there. I worked when it was closed.

EF: They were using it as a ... building.

VE: They were using it as a nothing. I think they had insurance on it. They had . . . there, I was the easiest person to move there.

EF: They had to keep it open?

VE: Under the insurance provision they had to have somebody in there. I adapted. I adapted to that. I was in that building a lot by myself.

EF: We'll probably have to wrap this up. Thank you so much.

VE: Thank you.