

ORAL HISTORY RELEASE FORM

DATE: 3-29-00

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Signature of Interviewee: Rita Moseley

Name: Rita Moseley

Address: 514 S. VA. Street, Farmville, VA 23901

Name of Interviewer: Clarissa Powell, Katie Soule.

Special Restrictions:

ORAL HISTORY DATA SHEET (to be turned in with tapes & transcript)INTERVIEWEE: ~~Star~~ Rita Moseley

ADDRESS: 514 S. VA. Street, Farmville, VA 23901

DATE OF INTERVIEW: 3-29-00

PLACE OF INTERVIEW: - Prince Edward High School

INTERVIEWER/S: Clarissa Powell, Katie Soule

TOPICS COVERED: The Prince Edward School Closings

NUMBER OF TAPES: 1

Clarissa Powell - cep 5/4/00
Katie Soule - KSP
Transcription of Ms. Rita Mosely
Civil Rights of Prince Edward County

(Interviewed March 22, 2000)

Interviewer: When and where were you born?

Moseley: I was born here in Prince Edward County in 1947.

I: Were you raised your entire life in Prince Edward County?

M: I was.

I: Did you have any brothers and sisters? Did you live with your parents?

M: My mom and dad were separated when I was a little baby girl. He was from Florida and when he went back I never saw him again. I was raised by four women: my mother, my grandmother, and two aunts. And I only had one brother.

I: How old were you when the Prince Edward County schools closed?

M: I was 12 years old. No, I was 9. I lost two years when they first closed. When they first closed they sent students away to different areas. They tried to get the seniors sent away first. When they got to me, I had already lost two years.

I: So where did you go to school?

M: I went to school in Blacksburg, Virginia.

I: Did you commute there or live there with a family member?

M: I lived with two elderly ladies. One was in her nineties and her daughter was in her eighties. Her daughter was assistant principal in Radford I believe. I lived with them; her daughter would go and live in Radford. She would be assistant principal for the week and come home on the weekends and I would stay with her mother while she was staying there.

I: Initially when the schools closed, what were your feelings? Did it affect you in any way when you first heard about the closings?

M: Well, of course it affected me because I couldn't go to school. I felt really bad about that. And I felt bad because we didn't have anywhere to go. We were just hanging around. And I wasn't really that upset as far as crying every day because all my other friends, they were out of school too. I had a couple of close friends that didn't live in my neighborhood that were sent away to school and one was sent to Catholic school. When she came to say goodbye, she hugged me and said, "I wish you could go with me." That was one sad thing. I didn't see her again until about twenty years later.

I: Do you keep in touch now?

M: No, but when she comes back to visit in Farmville, I may see her.

I: We've been informed that you and your brother were separated during the school closings. Is that correct?

M: Yes, it is.

I: Did you want to talk about that and tell us why you were separated?

M: That was a very sad moment. Me being sent away, I had never been away from home before as far as spending the night with someone. And we were separated because I was the only one who had somewhere to go. Some students they just never found a place for them to go to school. That was a very sad time. I had to leave my family.

I: Were you close with him before you were separated?

M: We were very close.

I: Do you still see him now? Is your relationship strong again?

M: No, by the time I came back and finished school, he left and he moved to Connecticut. Then he moved to this place and to that place. My brother and I are not close as far as seeing each other. Two years ago, it had been ten years since I had seen him. And before that it was ten years before that. He lives in Maine and it's so far and I was determined two years ago that I wasn't going to let another ten years pass. He came home then because my mother had passed. and I promised him that I was not going to let another ten years pass without seeing him again, so I went to Maine to visit him two years ago. We keep in touch over the phone on a regular basis. But as far as being close, we lost that.

I: Why did you choose to stay in Prince Edward County your whole life? Your brother went to different states to live, why did you decide to stay here?

M: I got married for one thing and we just stayed. And I had another choice, but when school reopened, I was told by the elderly people I lived with that if I stayed there, they'd send me to college. But knowing that the schools reopened, I came home, I regret that now, knowing that I missed out on a college education. I couldn't stand being away from my family when I could be with them.

I: Since you've worked in Prince Edward schools, we've been told by some of our speakers that the schools may be reverting back to how they were, like the ratio of white teachers to black teachers. Have you seen any changes like that?

M: No, I haven't thought about the schools reverting back. I guess the ratio of the teachers has changed, but that has changed over a long time, years. But no, I don't see that. I just never thought of that.

I: Do you think the people who live in Prince Edward County are still affected by the school closings?

M: They'll always be affected. If someone says they should forget it because it was in

the past, I think they are sadly mistaken. I think they'll always be affected. And because they were affected, their children are affected, and their children. I've seen that now in the school systems.

I: Do you ever find it hard to tell your story?

M: Yes, yes. Usually, particularly if I'm in the room talking with others about it, I really feel sad, especially if another person is talking about it and breaks down and cries. We all feel that emotion and it becomes really sad then.

I: Do you think it helps to talk about it? Even though it's hurtful, do you feel better after you've gotten everything out and communicate with other people who know what you've dealt with?

M: I think a lot of times compared to the people I talk to, I have less anger and less hurt than they do. I find a lot of that when I talk to people. I guess it probably helps because I talk so often. Like I told you, I was interviewed for the Education Week paper, and I've been interviewed for a book that's been published. So I think it probably does help to talk about it.

I: Did anything positive come out of your experience? Do you think you got a better education going to school in Blacksburg, any new experiences?

M: The most positive thing that came out of it was that I got the opportunity to go to school. I could have missed all four years like almost all of my friends. I don't think that I got a better education. I think I would have gotten a better education here. We had excellent teachers. Students were eager to learn. The positive thing that may have come out of it was I got the opportunity to leave home. I never would gotten that opportunity at a young age. And to meet others.

I: Do you have any children of your own?

M: I have two.

I: Do you ever talk to them about it?

M: I was really careful as they were growing up as not to talk to them in anger or in a negative way. I told them as less as possible when they were young and when I did really tell them about it, they were old enough to understand because I didn't want them to grow up like... I saw so many young people grow up with hatred toward others and usually it wasn't the ones who were responsible for it. I was very careful about that when I did tell them.

I: Do you have any resentment to the school system even as an employee?

M: I don't have any resentment to the school system. I still feel... and not that often, but I feel some resentment to the people in the county who were responsible for the events in the past. But not to the school system because it wasn't our school system to my knowledge that was responsible. So, no I don't.

I: Would you describe the school closings as a positive thing, a negative thing, or a little of both?

M: It was definitely a negative thing. It destroyed so many people's lives and it took away my family. It took away my friends. And it took away my education. There is nothing positive that can ever come out of that.

I: Is there anything else you'd like to share about your friends? I know that you said most of them didn't go to school. Where are they now?

M: A lot of my friends are still here. A lot of them moved to different parts of the country and I never saw them again and I don't think I ever will after these 30 years. My brother... I felt really sad for years and years because I knew he never got the opportunity to attend school and I did. And I found out a couple of years ago that he got his GED in Ohio. I didn't realize that and all these years I've been upset about that. So many of my friends.... My sister-in-law, she was an A-student. To my knowledge, she never finished. And so many of their lives were destroyed because they were really good students and they never got the opportunity to finish. A lot of them were older than I and when the schools reopened they were in their 20's. They had gotten jobs and didn't want to leave them. They wouldn't come back to school at the age of 20 and sit in a classroom with someone who was 14. It just destroyed a lot of people's lives.

I: So how old was your brother when the schools closed?

M: He was one year younger than I.

I: When you came back to PEC to go to school, were there a lot of different age groups within your grade?

M: Yes, it was.

I: How did you catch up on those two years?

M: It really wasn't a matter of me catching up. Because what you don't get, sometimes you can't get. I was fortunate enough to be a pretty good student. When I went to Blacksburg, Virginia I was named valedictorian of that class before I went to high school. But I had only been there a year and they felt that would be unfair to the students that were there all the year, so I was salutatorian.

I: So you didn't really catch up, you just skipped those two years?

M: When we came back that year to go to school, it was called the Free School. It wasn't really like the regular school program and what they did was have people come from all over the country who volunteered to teach us. They just taught us bits and pieces. It wasn't like they went through the whole book. I think that's one of the reasons I wasn't an excellent math person because with the Algebra and Geometry, I guess we only took a few weeks for them. Things like that I never really got caught up on. I guess I did pretty well because I finished high school and graduated.

I: Of the students that participated in the walk-out at the Moton School, did you know any of them?

M: No, at that time I was really young. I think I was six years old when it first started.

I remember I did know of a couple of them I think. But I don't really remember that much about that.

I: We learned that a lot of students' parents lost their jobs because of that.

M: I heard that later, since people had been talking about it, but I didn't know anything about it at the time.

I: You said there's things you keep on learning about that time period. Do you Remember some of the things you've learned as you've gotten older?

M: Well I don't know the details, but I've always heard that the reason schools closed was because a group of townspeople went to the bank in the middle of the night or something. That's what I heard as a child. They had gotten money from the bank to purchase the private schools so the white kids would have somewhere to go to school. That's what I always believed and now I realize that there was more than that to it and that the courts denied funding or something for the public schools. So I think there was more to that but that was the basis of what I've always learned.

I: Is there anything that you wanted to say that you haven't said, just to let us know?

M: No, not really. It's just that most of the time when they talk about the school closings I think they forget a lot about the people who never ever had the opportunity all four or five years. And I think they never get to know how it affected them because if you didn't go to high school yourself and then you have children in high school, how can you help them with life or their school work if you've never had it yourself? That made a big difference particularly after the first five or six years into school. It really affected the people. I think it still affects some of these kids here today.

I: It's like a cycle. If the parents didn't get educated, they don't know how to help their children.

M: That's right and I'm not saying it just because of them. I had an example with my children with Algebra. I was never taught Algebra enough to understand it because we just did some and when my kids had that I couldn't help them, so my husband was older than I was and he had gotten it in high school and was able to help them. And that was the only thing I wasn't able to help them. I can imagine kids who didn't go to school at all, how they want to help their kids now.

I: Thank you very much.

M: Thank you.

Katie Soule
Clarissa Powell 5/4/00