

Interview with Anne Byrd, Carol Raymond, and Tonnette Jackson
Lucy F. Simms School Oral History Project

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Name of interviewers: Mays Qasem, Owen Longacre, Michael Terrones

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Interview with Anne Byrd, Carol Raymond, and Tonnette Jackson

Mays Qasem 00:00

I'm Mays Qasem. Today is February 28, 2023. We're at the Simms Education Center and it's four o'clock. So Carol, did you grow up in Harrisonburg?

Carol Raymond 00:11

I did. I've lived here all my life.

Mays Qasem 00:14

Did you guys grow up in Harrisonburg?

Tonnette Jackson 00:17

I grew up here. I currently live in Alaska and I've been there for four years.

Mays Qasem 00:31

Do you guys want to go ahead and introduce yourselves?

Carol Raymond 00:35

My name is Carol Johnson Raymond. I come from a family of eight and out of the eight, six of them attended Simms school. I'm number seven out of eight and I have one younger sister.

Mays Qasem 00:55

[Anne Byrd, Carol Raymond, Tonnette Jackson – Lucy F. Simms School Oral Histories]

For you or your fam- Do you guys want to introduce yourselves as well?

Anne Byrd 01:00

I'm Anne Byrd, Anne Johnson Byrd. I'm third of eight. I grew up in Harrisonburg. I'm still in Harrisonburg [laughs]. I am.

Tonnette Jackson 01:17

I'm Tonette Johnson Jackson. I grew up here in Harrisonburg. I attended Simms from kindergarten to seventh grade. And I currently live in Anchorage, Alaska, and I've been there for four years.

Owen Longacre 01:34

Okay, so you traveled pretty far to get here.

Tonnette Jackson 01:39

I've been here since October started. I've been coming back and forth [laughs].

Owen Longacre 01:43

I see. Okay. So you're here for a longer visit.

Anne Byrd 01:46

I grew up...I went to school here also. So I went...started school in '56 and went until '64. And then I went to the high school.

Mays Qasem 02:02

For you or your family, how did you guys arrive at the Simms School? Was it by bus or by foot?

Carol Raymond 02:08

They walked to school. I mean we lived right here on the corner. So they used to just run across the street.

Anne Byrd 02:14

On Johnson Street. [Laughs]

Owen Longacre 02:15

Really! So, can we see your old house? Is it still standing?

Anne Byrd 02:19

No, it's torn down.

Tonnette Jackson 02:21

So, the house was right here on the corner. There was a house right? Well, there's a house there now. But there was another house right beside it and that's where we lived. I don't know what year we moved but...

[Anne Byrd, Carol Raymond, Tonnette Jackson – Lucy F. Simms School Oral Histories]

Carol Raymond 02:35

I think I was probably around four or five years old when we moved to Myrtle Street, so probably about '64. Yeah.

Mays Qasem 02:48

So Miss Carol, although may have not attended the Simms school, could you tell us about your family experiences with Lucy Simms?

Carol Raymond 02:57

I mean, the school has been a staple in the community for, you know, as long as I can remember. I used to stand on the edge of the sidewalk and watch my brother Greg go across the street. And my mom would say 'you can't go any further than the stairs.' And I used to just watch him walk in the building. And then I would just go back home.

Mays Qasem 03:19

Since you guys attended the Simms school, could you tell us about your experience?

Anne Byrd 03:23

I guess some of my experiences that we looked forward to- We had a May Day. We also had a band. We had a choir. We actually went to—our choir went to Junior State. Won the state award. Let's see what else. Yeah, we had basketball. We had a kite day. Yeah, in March, we always had a kite day. We looked forward to it. That's all I can think of right now.

Owen Longacre 04:02

So obviously you were able to walk to school. As you mentioned you lived right on the corner. When you arrived at the school, let's start with maybe the earlier elementary days. What was your day like? What do you remember from walking the hallways to going to classes? What stands out to you as you think back?

Tonnette Jackson 04:23

Well. One thing I do remember is we always had school clothes to go to school. So back then girls didn't wear pants. So you always had a dress on. Almost dressed like you were kind of going to church in a way, but not to that level. And you basically came in. Most all the teachers were very disciplined. They all knew your parents. So if something happened in school, your parents knew about it before you ever got across the line here. And, so a typical day was you just showed up and went to your classes. You know, second grade, everybody had the same teacher for second grade, everybody had the same teacher for first grade. I think for my older brothers, there was a different teacher. But Anne and I both had the same teachers all through until we left the school.

Owen Longacre 05:23

Okay.

[Anne Byrd, Carol Raymond, Tonnette Jackson – Lucy F. Simms School Oral Histories]

Tonnette Jackson 05:24

So you know, so we weren't changing classes at our age, because those were our elementary years. And we always looked forward to lunch, because we had ladies in the community that cooked so there were always hearty lunches, and the cafeteria was downstairs. So it was, you know, it looks like a typical day of what you guys probably do when you go to your school. But I don't think that we saw it as anything special. We were just going to school.

Mays Qasem 06:01

What grades did y'all attend here?

Anne Byrd 06:03

Here? From kindergarten to eighth grade. And then after eighth grade, I transferred to Harrisonburg High. I did.

Tonnette Jackson 06:13

And I started in kindergarten and my last year here was the seventh-grade year. That was the year the schools integrated. And we had a choice that year to stay here or go to Harrisonburg High. And our class decided that we would stay here. So we were kind of like the last seventh graders, because their classes had already gone. And so it was like maybe 14 of us in a class at the time.

Owen Longacre 06:44

I hadn't heard about that before. Was that a decision every grade got to make or was it unique to your seventh grade class?

Tonnette Jackson 06:52

It was unique to that year.

Owen Longacre 06:53

Okay.

Tonnette Jackson 06:54

So, schools integrated, and then the following year, they closed the school down. This school got closed down. So you really didn't have a choice at that point. So...

Owen Longacre 07:05

I guess I hadn't realized that some classes might have moved on and some had stayed for that one year in between.

Tonnette Jackson 07:12

Yeah. So we just happened to be the oldest of all the classes that were left that year, I would say. And so there were other classes that were here. So I don't really remember too much about, you know... I know of maybe one or two people in our class that decided to go. And then before the semester was up, they came back to finish out that year. Is there a particular place in

[Anne Byrd, Carol Raymond, Tonnette Jackson – Lucy F. Simms School Oral Histories]

this building that holds a lot of memories to you? I would say the gym. Because it was the center of activities. We didn't have girls' basketball, but we had boys' basketball. Also it was our auditorium. So we had plays or we had Christmas programs or we had Easter stuff or whatever we had. That was the center where everybody gathered.

Anne Byrd 08:27

I was a cheerleader. And we used to play teams from Front Royal, Winchester, it was called Criser High, Waynesboro, Staunton... We had basketball games that the guys played, so we were happy to go to games. Let's see what else... Like I said we had a choir, we had a band. As far as the socializing in the hall or anything, we really didn't socialize a lot, but we get to talk to our friends or what have you in the hallway. Because they no nonsense, you had to get to class [laughs].

Owen Longacre 09:10

I'm actually interested to hear that you did not have a basketball team for the ladies. We had interviewed Miss Sampson earlier and she had played on the team.

Tonnette Jackson 09:28

Right. Yeah.

Owen Longacre 09:28

Do you have any idea why maybe that wouldn't have been available?

Anne Byrd 09:32

I don't. Because our mother...well Mama didn't play but she was here when that was happening. But I really don't know.

Tonnette Jackson 09:39

Yeah, we were talking about it last night. There were no girls' sports during my time here. So you know what we did, we did play softball, but it was something that was not school sanctioned. So, I don't really know. I don't know and probably never thought about it growing up. You know, we were just little girls and that's, you know, unlike today where everybody's liberated, we were just young girls and we did girl things. [The sisters all laugh.]

Mays Qasem 10:28

So since you're a cheerleader, how was that? Did you guys like travel around?

Anne Byrd 10:32

We traveled to Front Royal, like I stated. We'd go to Lee, Winchester was called Criser High in Winchester. Pigeon Forge. Lee and Rosenwald in Waynesboro called Waynesboro High School now. It was called Rosenwald then. Yeah.

Owen Longacre 10:52

Rosenwald?

[Anne Byrd, Carol Raymond, Tonnette Jackson – Lucy F. Simms School Oral Histories]

Anne Byrd 10:55
Uh-huh, Rosenwald.

Owen Longacre 10:59
Right. I recognize that.

Mays Qasem 11:02
How long did you do cheer for?

Tonnette Jackson 11:04
I did cheerleading for probably about two years, I guess. Before I went to the high school. It wasn't long.

Mays Qasem 11:14
How were y'all's classes like?

Anne Byrd 11:16
What were they like?

Mays Qasem 11:17
Yeah.

Anne Byrd 11:21
Well, we had, we had set classes that we had to take. There was no changing your classes. So you took the curriculum they had set.

Tonnette Jackson 11:34
So, nothing different. We didn't even have like electives or nothing like that. Just like...

Anne Byrd 11:41
No honors classes, things like that. We didn't have anything like that.

Owen Longacre 11:46
Well, we're sitting in your second grade classroom. Could I ask, do you have any particular memories of this room or Miss Awkard? And what maybe second grade was like as we're sitting here at the table?

Anne Byrd 11:58
Well Miss Awkward was mean. [Laughs] I'll just tell you, she was mean, she was strict.

Tonnette Jackson 12:04
Stern.

[Anne Byrd, Carol Raymond, Tonnette Jackson – Lucy F. Simms School Oral Histories]

Anne Byrd 12:05

She had no nonsense. And when she said do something, you did it. You didn't talk back. If you did, like Tony said, mama and daddy would know. When we got home, they would already know. She, I mean, her class was- It was strict and she was the head of the class. Basically. Nobody was talking, if we did talk, she'd makes sure we didn't talk no more [laugh].

Owen Longacre 12:33

Right.

Tonnette Jackson 12:35

So, we were talking to our brother last night, who also lives in Alaska, and he's older. And so in his memory of Miss Awkard, because mine is pretty much kind of like Anne's. We just showed up and it was just a day in her class. But one of his memories was- Or two of them, was that she taught us to write and she also taught us to tell time. And so there was a big clock in the foyer out here. And he said, you know that you'd have to go out and see what time it is. And then I guess you'd come back or I don't know how they did it. But she was just, you know, like the steady, stern, steadfast type person. And I would say that, I would say she was a good teacher.

Anne Byrd 13:34

A very good teacher.

Owen Longacre 13:35

She had high expectations.

Tonnette Jackson 13:37

[Several Voice] Yes. And again, you know, in a Black school. This was like, respect for elders was like a big deal. You know, there was no way you was coming into anyone's class and being disrespectful. I mean, it just wasn't gonna happen because the teachers had permission to spank you. And they had permission, they had this ruler thing where, you know, they hold your hand or knuckle and hit you with the ruler... and your parents were fine with that. So yeah, so I mean, the room. I can kind of like see myself in this room. I remember that. Clear as a bell.

Owen Longacre 14:14

Where do you see yourself?

Tonnette Jackson 14:15

Right over here. You know, there were little short tables.

Anne Byrd 14:19

She had like a kitchen setup.

Tonnette Jackson 14:21

[Anne Byrd, Carol Raymond, Tonnette Jackson – Lucy F. Simms School Oral Histories]

And, you know, it was just like being busy kids doing whatever. But I mean, I do remember, you know, sitting in this class. It's kind of crazy, actually.

Anne Byrd 14:31

Kinda weird [laughs].

Tonnette Jackson 14:33

Yeah.

Owen Longacre 14:34

Is the chalkboard still the same?

Tonnette Jackson 14:36

Yes. Yes. I will say the only thing that is different is it has paint and those doors. I don't remember those being there, but they may have been there but I don't remember that. And, you know, we kind of had old desks, kind of old chairs. But of course, as young people, it wasn't a big deal to us because we hadn't seen anything any different.

Owen Longacre 15:03

Okay.

Tonnette Jackson 15:05

You know, so. But yeah, Miss Awkard she was quite a teacher.

Michael Terrones 15:13

She made a pretty strong impression, Miss Awkard. Were there any other teachers in the building that you felt, like had a strong impact on you or were notable in any way?

Tonnette Jackson 15:22

Yes, I would say, probably the majority of them. So Miss Pat Blakey was kindergarten/first grade when I came through. And of course, you know, kindergarten/first grade was mostly just fun and games I would say. And then Miss Awkard. And then our third grade teacher was Miss Bates, who- She had a gentle voice, and she was a pleasant lady, and I always really liked her. And Miss Arrington, I don't know if you guys a familiar with Miss Arrington. She taught fourth grade. She was stern too. She was...

Anne Byrd 16:00

Very stern.

Tonnette Jackson 16:01

She probably wasn't quite as tough as Mrs. Awkard, but she was stern. And then, you know, I mean, I can name all of our teachers. You know, we had a couple that was here. Mr. and Mrs. Eubanks. Mrs. Eubanks was a fifth grade teacher. Mr. Moore was our sixth grade teacher. And Don Banks, I don't know if you guys know him, was our seventh grade teacher, for me. And Mr.

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Moore was probably the other teacher that I think a lot of the kids really liked. He also had a choir, he's the one that coordinated and director of the choir. And he was just always the same, like his demeanor was like, kind of like Miss Bates. But he was just always the same. And he was just kind of like a cool guy for little kids back in that day.

Owen Longacre 16:58

And he was sixth grade?

Tonnette Jackson 16:59

He was a sixth grade teacher, yes.

Mays Qasem 17:03

Is there any teacher in particular that inspired you? Or encouraged you to do something?

Anne Byrd 17:08

I don't really have that fuzzy feeling from the teachers then. Again, we were talking to our brother last night and he mentioned there's Mr. Eubanks. She was mentioning that his wife was my favorite. Absolutely loved her. And then we had Mr. Eubanks had industrial arts classes. He did and then they'd have a program where they'd come and they'd see what the guys had made. I don't think any of the girls were, we weren't in there.

Tonnette Jackson 17:08

No, no girls, it was like a shop class.

Anne Byrd 17:51

Nobody was involved with that.

Owen Longacre 17:53

And this would have been in your older middle school years?

Anne Byrd 17:57

No, this is in the school. This was everything, like...

Owen Longacre 18:03

Okay.

Anne Byrd 18:04

The elementary was downstairs and higher classes were upstairs. And then we had the downstairs where we had the lunch room and when you go down the steps here. And then we had his shop down there, probably kind of where the arc is but the back of it.

Tonnette Jackson 18:19

Right, because this is new part.

[Anne Byrd, Carol Raymond, Tonnette Jackson – Lucy F. Simms School Oral Histories]

Anne Byrd 18:22

And also the new part over here.

Tonnette Jackson 18:25

I think he was there for a long time. So I don't know what year you took shop. But I do remember both of my older brothers took shop and they made tables and they had it in their bedroom for like a long, long time.

Mays Qasem 18:48

Is there an event, or like a celebration, that happened at the school that you remember in particular?

Anne Byrd 18:53

Yes, as I say, we had a choir, we had a big choir. Looked forward to that. We had May Day which is always in May when we wrap the maypole and Miss Lucy Simms in that book was the one that started that at the school. So it just went all the way through. And yeah, we looked forward to that. We had a kite day, like I say in March.

Owen Longacre 19:19

Which one was your favorite?

Anne Byrd 19:21

May Day.

Owen Longacre 19:24

I've been sharing and I didn't know if you already knew that May Day is still celebrated at Waterman.

Anne Byrd 19:30

Yes, it is.

Owen Longacre 19:31

My wife taught there for nine years. She always did that celebration and we didn't realize that it originated here and I thought that was pretty neat.

Anne Byrd 19:42

My kids were involved in all of that at Waterman. Because my son went to Waterman and my daughters went to Spotswood.

Tonnette Jackson 19:51

And I would say the same thing. It was like, it was kinda like a fourth of July day. Yeah. You know, we got new clothes.

Anne Byrd 19:58

[Anne Byrd, Carol Raymond, Tonnette Jackson – Lucy F. Simms School Oral Histories]

You got to be out of school all day [laughs].

Tonnette Jackson 20:01

And you're out of school and it was just, you know, the whole community was here. And they always had the Maypole in the back here. And yeah. So and then again, I had read Miss Lucy F. Simms' book, like Anne was just saying, and found out that she's the one that started that. So, never knew that until I read the book like a couple weeks ago. So, you know, I would say that was my favorite, yeah.

Anne Byrd 20:30

Also, I was looking at the life before and after the videos of mom and them talking today. And Mr. [Gillen?] was saying that Miss Lucy Simms donated this land to the city to build a school.

Owen Longacre 20:51

I didn't know that.

Tonnette Jackson 20:52

But it was a plantation, it was also slaves. So-

Owen Longacre 20:57

I hadn't realized she donated the land.

Tonnette Jackson 21:04

Well, it was the land—the plantation owners, the last name was Gray. And she was a slave.

Owen Longacre 21:11

Yes.

Tonnette Jackson 21:12

And the younger child, and I can't remember her name, I want to say Ellen something? Ellen. I think she's the one that was responsible for giving the land because their home, which was a mansion, back in the day, whatever that looked like, was right on top of the hill of Ralph Sampson Park.

Owen Longacre 21:35

Absolutely.

Tonnette Jackson 21:35

And so, you know, just interesting stuff. Yeah, I mean, I'm just learning that Miss Lucy F. Simms, it's not just a name in a book or a name on a building. She was like, invested in her community, invested in education, and taught in many schools around the county, actually, not just Harrisonburg. So have you read that book?

Owen Longacre 22:09

[Anne Byrd, Carol Raymond, Tonnette Jackson – Lucy F. Simms School Oral Histories]

I have. And our students have spent time first learning her story. Of course, she didn't teach here, she taught at Effinger Street down the road. And part of that was learning that you know once she passed, how this building was named after her. Although she didn't teach here, however, her legacy continues to live on that way.

Mays Qasem 22:35

Would you say the teachers had a close relationship with parents?

Owen Longacre 22:51

Yeah, describe that? Because that's obviously very different than I think how teachers and parents interact in today's world. What was that like knowing that your teachers and parents were talking all the time? And How did that make you feel as students?

Anne Byrd 23:06

Yes. Absolutely. They knew... [Everyone laughs]. I mean, they knew our parents backwards and hand front. Well, you know, I guess we weren't around a lot, but they did come to the house. A lot of them would come to the house. And Mama would interact wherever they might be. She would interact or Daddy would interact with them. Or they will interact with them. So it was just a community thing. Like, I mean, they knew each other. I mean, you know, just like, they know what kids would come into school, and who's gonna be in what class, so forth and so on. Okay.

Tonnette Jackson 24:33

I think you just... Well, my mother, first of all, was a parent that was invested in and engaged in. And so she was not only with, you know, her children, but in the community. And so, I don't know. I don't think I have any specific feelings. I think it helped in many ways for our community because you weren't going to get away with things. You know, you were going to- Most kids were going to come to school and do what they were supposed to do. And parents were not going to go against the teachers like today. You know, today, you're not only fighting kids that may have behavior issues, but you're fighting parents that are crazy, basically.

Owen Longacre 24:33

Your words.

Tonnette Jackson 24:34

Yes, exactly. And so it was, like I said, it was a united front. And even if your parents did not agree with maybe what went down, the only person that knew that was them and the teachers. You didn't as a child, you didn't know that. You know, because I'm sure my mother disagreed with some things that particularly would happen to my brothers, you know, if something happened. But still there was that high respect level. So yeah.

Mays Qasem 25:05

So how were the principals?

Anne Byrd 25:11

[Anne Byrd, Carol Raymond, Tonnette Jackson – Lucy F. Simms School Oral Histories]

Well, I guess when I came, our principal- I had Mr. Giles was his name. He was very stern. No nonsense. Like I say he would take you back in the room and crack you if you did something wrong. That's just the way it was. And there was nothing like calling the parents saying I did it. He did it, you know. And then like I said, when we got home Mother would know, Daddy would know what we did. Because I skipped school one day behind here [laughs]. When I was a kid. And he kind of stuttered. He told us, 'it's time to call your parents.' There was like five or four of us and he caught us behind the school [laughs]

Owen Longacre 25:53

Sounds like there's more of a story there.

Anne Byrd 25:54

Yeah it was quite the story [laughs]. We didn't want to be in class, so... Anyway, we just decided to do that one day. We didn't do it no more.

Owen Longacre 26:03

Yeah.

Anne Byrd 26:05

But he was real stern. And he said, 'you're not gonna do this again, I'm going to send you home.' Got sent home sometimes with things. Like Tony was saying, the parents, maybe they didn't agree with it. But they went along with his authority to us.

Mays Qasem 26:24

So, that's how they disciplined you, they would send you home?

Carol Raymond 26:28

Well, I guess they sent you home if you really did something really bad, you know.

Tonnette Jackson 26:34

Or send you to the office and you'd just have to sit there. Just, you know, deal with whatever... Because most likely your parents were not coming to the school. No, they were working. Most parents were working. And so you were just going to sit in the office until they said, you know, go back to class or school was out. So...

Owen Longacre 26:58

I wanted to, before we moved on to any other questions. Going back to the teachers, I had heard from some others that the teachers might have even lived in some of the homes of families in this community?

Tonnette Jackson 27:15

Yes.

Owen Longacre 27:15

[Anne Byrd, Carol Raymond, Tonnette Jackson – Lucy F. Simms School Oral Histories]

Did any teachers ever live in your home?

Tonnette Jackson 27:18

No.

Owen Longacre 27:19

Okay, but had you heard of that in other families?

Anne Byrd 27:22

There's a house across the street from the post office, downtown now. Where the market is. So, Mr. Atkins house, that big white house that sits in the middle. That was a Dr. Atkins and his wife owned that home. And they were from Washington D.C. actually. Actually I should say they're from here. So they were born here, one of them was born here and they moved to Washington D.C. But that home belonged to them also.

Tonnette Jackson 27:54

So it was like a boarding house. It had apartments in it, like rooms or apartments in it.

Anne Byrd 28:00

Actually we lived in that house.

Tonnette Jackson 28:02

We did, I remember that.

Owen Longacre 28:06

You did?!

Anne Byrd 28:08

We did [laughs].

Tonnette Jackson 28:09

I don't know how old-

Anne Byrd 28:10

Yeah, we were young.

Owen Longacre 28:12

Before you moved to Johnson Street?

Anne Byrd 28:14

Well, yeah. Yeah. This is when we were really young. Yeah, before we move to Johnson Street actually. Carol won't remember, she wasn't even thought about. [Sisters all laugh]. Yeah, it was, well, my sister and my older brothers.

[Anne Byrd, Carol Raymond, Tonnette Jackson – Lucy F. Simms School Oral Histories]

Mays Qasem 28:35

Our understanding was that the school served as an important pillar to the community. Do you feel that this is true?

Tonnette Jackson 28:42

Say that again, I'm sorry.

Mays Qasem 28:44

That the school was an important pillar to the surrounding community?

Tonnette Jackson 28:47

Definitely. Definitely. It was that and church. Yeah. The church. Yeah.

Owen Longacre 28:54

Were there any events that were out here maybe outside of school hours, where the school kind of served as the gathering place?

Tonnette Jackson 29:02

I would say I don't remember any events that weren't sanctioned by the school...

Anne Byrd 29:09

I remember there used to be lawn parties, out here. In the parking lots out here a lot.

Tonnette Jackson 29:14

But you know, like it was, it was a playground. So I don't know what year they put the basketball courts in, over here, the parking lot over here. And then there was a swingset, and there was a merry-go-round, and a slide, that sit back right off of the basketball court. And then of course, the baseball field where it is today, it was always there. And then like on after school on weekends, the guys who are in [in shape and tomboys too]... But they were playing like flag football up front here, on the front lawn. So there were like 60 kids, I think we counted. But it was 70, I counted more. It was like 75 kids on Johnson Street. Yeah, that just lived right there on Johnson Street. From the corner down to right past Broad Street. So, there were big families. And so it was like a playground. But I don't remember any other like events. Most of the events in the community, probably went through the churches, you know. So-

Owen Longacre 30:09

Wow.

Anne Byrd 30:29

Well, the American Legion used to put on like a lawn party like they do. In Bridgewater and places like that. And it used to be, like, right out here, where the parking lot is. And we'd look forward to that every year.

Owen Longacre 30:40

[Anne Byrd, Carol Raymond, Tonnette Jackson – Lucy F. Simms School Oral Histories]

And these were put on by the churches?

Anne Byrd 30:43

No, this was actually the American Legion.

Owen Longacre 30:46

American Legion, I'm sorry.

Anne Byrd 30:46

Which were part of the community fathers and part of the community also.

Owen Longacre 30:52

Well, that actually, it's a great question. We also were just wondering if you could tell us about the community around the Simms School and what that was like growing up in this neighborhood? And memories you have about the community members or the places you would have gone to, even outside of school... What was the neighborhood around Simms like, during those years that you would have attended? Or even after?

Anne Byrd 31:18

I think we used to have fun in the neighborhood.

Tonnette Jackson 31:21

Yeah, our neighborhood was all the way live all the time. Because there were lots of kids. And we were outdoors playing in the summer all the time. When the weather was good, we were outdoors. We were riding bicycles, we were skating. We were having picnics, we were out climbing trees. When we were young, back over here after the softball- baseball field, it was just cow pasture over here. All the way over here until Washington Street all the way home. There was just nothing but cow pasture. So, I can remember, there was a fence back there. And we would go, we would climb the fence. And to step outside of the community, we would ride our bikes like out to the livestock. Which is not a long way, but in those days it was a long way. And probably we had no business out there. But we would go out there, we could walk up through the livestock. You know, we could poke at the cows and pigs or whatever. But we did create things. I mean, I remember me and my brother, it could be a hot summer day and we'd be on the side of the house in the shade, shooting marbles. We played hopscotch. We played bat and ball. We played jack rocks. I can never remember being bored as a child growing up because we did children things.

Anne Byrd 32:50

We had pogo sticks. Yup, a lot of people in Johnson Street didn't have pogo sticks, but we did [laughs].

Owen Longacre 32:57

Even without a cell phone?

[Anne Byrd, Carol Raymond, Tonnette Jackson – Lucy F. Simms School Oral Histories]

Tonnette Jackson 32:59

Even without a cell phone... [laughs]. We did have a TV, black and white.

Carol Raymond 33:03

We had a radio.

Tonnette Jackson 33:05

You know. Normally we would only probably watch TV on a Saturday evening or Sunday

Anne Byrd 33:10

Sunday it was Lassie, the Ed Sullivan Show, stuff like that. Lawrence Welk. That's what we watched.

Owen Longacre 33:20

Was there a sense of togetherness in the community as well, since a lot of- everybody is going through Simms School. You talk about the teachers and all that...

Tonnette Jackson 33:29

Yeah. Definitely.

Owen Longacre 33:30

Can you talk to that at all about what that togetherness might have felt like?

Tonnette Jackson 33:34

I don't know, I guess as a young person when that's all you know, it's kind of like this routine. It's just an everyday thing. But we just had a real close knit community.

Anne Byrd 33:51

I think it was like-

Tonnette Jackson 33:52

And we had, you know, we did different things with different families. But, our community was always united. Always.

Anne Byrd 34:06

It was like a family oriented—even in the community, even though you weren't in this family, that family. But we were in our family, but the families around us, like we had families and they would always interact. And wherever we'd go, we'd take them, basically. Things like that.

Owen Longacre 34:07

Took care of each other.

Anne Byrd 34:18

[Anne Byrd, Carol Raymond, Tonnette Jackson – Lucy F. Simms School Oral Histories]

Yeah, we took care of each other. And then the parents interacted with each other also, you know.

Tonnette Jackson 34:30

I think it just was a big respect level, you know, for kids to...elders whatever you want to call them. And our family I would say my mom and dad were an exceptional couple in the community. One because they stayed together. And people just had a great respect for my mother, who loved kids. One of the things that my dad used to do is we could be here playing and he would whistle at six o'clock, from our porch on Myrtle Street. So, everybody went home at six o'clock to eat dinner. And so, it was just a united community.

Anne Byrd 35:24

And everybody respected that.

Carol Raymond 35:28

Not only was it a community thing, but like you said it was based around the school, the church, that kind of thing. And when I was listening to the question about the teachers and interacting in the community kind of thing. It was a community. So they used to do this thing. It's escaping me...progressive parties. So as kids, you know, I had older sisters and brothers. So they would have to stay at home and watch the younger ones and our parents would go in the community and to different people's houses, and they would socialize.

Owen Longacre 36:11

Okay.

Carol Raymond 36:12

I remember up on top of the hill, Monica Robinson lives in the house now, a lady named Miss Roberta Johnson. She probably had one of the most fabulous homes in the neighborhood, but lived up on top of the hill, had a great backyard. I remember they had that big old koi pond in the backyard, you know, little fish. You know, I distinctly remember when Brenda got married in the backyard. I mean, my brother and I were little. He was a ring bearer, and I have a picture and I'm just a little tiny thing with pigtails kind of thing. But you know, they used to dress up and take us, you know, we could go to things like that. But you knew that, you know 'you can be seen but just not heard' kind of thing. And that was all like an understanding. Mr. Alfred Howard, Stephanie's grandfather, they had a home down here on Johnson Street. They had a fabulous backyard, so they used to just entertain. So that was keeping people in the community. But then the teachers went to church with them, you know, and they socialized with them, and so everybody knew everybody.

Owen Longacre 37:23

And so these progressive parties, you would just go from house to house and just interact with each other?

Carol Raymond 37:30

[Anne Byrd, Carol Raymond, Tonnette Jackson – Lucy F. Simms School Oral Histories]

These were just adults. These were just the adults.

Mays Qasem 37:35

Are you all still in contact with any of those people?

Anne Byrd 37:39

A lot of them have passed on.

Carol Raymond 37:43

There's still the offspring or the siblings or the children. You know, we still kind of interact with some of them.

Anne Byrd 37:52

One specific place, they used to go was Rawley Springs. That was their highlight of the year.

Carol Raymond 38:00

And Shenandoah Lake too.

Tonnette Jackson 38:02

Shenandoah Lake, yeah.

Carol Raymond 38:03

And we used to always pack up a picnic lunch on Sundays after church and go to Shenandoah Lake so we could swim and have a picnic, kind of thing. That was just the kind of person my mom was. And then we used to take everybody. We had a station wagon—[to Mays] you're not gonna know anything about this one—a station wagon where the backseat faces the other way. And you'd see all these little faces in the backseat, because everybody you know... So you'd just pile in and that kind of thing. So not only the eight of us, but probably twelve neighborhood kids as well. [everyone laughs]

Anne Byrd 38:37

We also used to go to Montgomery Park, up in Staunton. Which is not called Montgomery anymore.

Tonnette Jackson 38:42

It's called Gypsy Hill Park.

Anne Byrd 38:45

Yeah, we used to have picnics up there in the summer. Yeah, they used to party up there too.

Owen Longacre 38:53

No shortage of fun. What I wrote down is "all the way live, all the time."

Tonnette Jackson 38:58

[Anne Byrd, Carol Raymond, Tonnette Jackson – Lucy F. Simms School Oral Histories]

All the way live.

Carol Raymond 38:59

All the time.

Anne Byrd 39:00

All the time.

Tonnette Jackson 39:01

There was always something going on. You know, you always had...there's always gonna be some bad apples in the bunch. But yeah, but I mean, we just, you know, like we tell our nieces and nephews, they have no idea what it's like to be a real kid, because of technology. You know, they have no idea. I mean, it just meant you had to be creative. And we were creative kids. [Laughs, sisters chime in.]

Carol Raymond 39:34

Right around the corner, where our church sits, is John Wesley. Just right around the corner, that was the neighborhood playground. When the Parks and Rec took over, you know, that was our playground and it was right behind our house. So we played softball, we had playground equipment, and they actually had a lady who ran the Parks and Rec program there. So, we played and we had badminton. And you would go and stay and once mom would yell out the back door, we would go home and eat lunch and then back to the playground until dad would come home.

Anne Byrd 40:19

They also had the park up here, the Parks and Rec, where Ralph Sampson Park is. We used to go to that one in the summer. That was free, y'all remember that one? And actually, the equipment was here in the school at the time. Because I remember renting it out. It was like an all day thing, you could come and go. So I guess just like a babysitting thing. Truthfully, it was.

Mays Qasem 40:51

So, in 1966 is when the schools integrated. Do y'all remember what y'all felt when you found out about that?

Tonnette Jackson 41:02

From what I can remember, we did not want to go. I don't know that we had a reason for why we didn't want to go. But we didn't want to go. Our class—it would have been my seventh grade class—but, once we went, it was fine. I mean, it was no big deal. I mean all our family played all the sports in Harrisonburg High School. Our brothers and her husband and my daughter's dad, they put Harrisonburg High School on the map for basketball. She has track records that have not been broken there yet. And so we actually played basketball. But, it was a little different back then. We had rolling guards going forward which everybody couldn't run the whole court, so anyway. But as far as here is concerned when you know we had to go, I don't even think we really thought a whole lot about it, other than... The only thing, and my brother mentioned this, is

[Anne Byrd, Carol Raymond, Tonnette Jackson – Lucy F. Simms School Oral Histories]

the kids that were in the county that were being bussed here from Elkton, McGaheysville, Grottoes, Weyers Cave, Mount Jackson, Linnville, [others chiming in] New Market, Keezletown, Brown's Hollow, which is down in Elkton, Greenwood down in there. All those kids were bused here to go to school. So, my brother was saying that he didn't want to do it because he wanted his best friends—lived in Timberville or somewhere down there. And so, you know, you lost that, we lost dear friends. So, I didn't think about that. But of course, Miss Alice Davis, that was here, she was from Elkton. Cause she was in an earlier class.

Carol Raymond 43:00

Actually, they lived in Bridgewater.

Tonnette Jackson 43:03

Is that where she lived? Oh okay. But anyway. Other than that, we just did what we were told for the most of it.

Owen Longacre 43:15

You mentioned that initially though, that you might have been hesitant. Can you speak to why that might have been the case? Why was your initial reaction that you did not want to go?

Tonnette Jackson 43:27

I think it was just the color barrier [others agreeing]. Even though in saying that we were never taught to not like people. And so anyone that came to our house was always welcome. And so, in our community, you know, the white, black thing, I don't think people...nobody even talked about that, that I can remember, growing up. Most of the parents worked for like, you know, well-to-do white families. They may have cleaned or cooked or babysat kids, you know whatever, whatever needed to be done. But for me, I don't think I really had any real opinion of it. It's like, we just all agreed and our parents all let us decide that one year. And like I said, other than two people, we all just set up that we're just gonna still stay here for this last year and across town it was like really no big deal.

Michael Terrones 44:40

Would you say that you feel that mentality kind of characterizes the greater Harrisonburg community or mostly [unclear]?

Tonnette Jackson 44:47

I would say the greater community. So my husband is from Atlanta, so he understands what real racism is, because he was raised in the heart of Atlanta. His mother had like 15 kids. And so, but for being raised here...I don't think we were sheltered from it, it's just that you kind of stayed in your place. I mean, I can remember going downtown on Saturdays. You know, they had Joseph Neys, Alfred Neys, they were like the really nice stores downtown. And, you know, Woolworths was there where Capital Ale is—[asking her sister] is that's where Woolworths was?—so we could go in those stores. But, you know, I remember there was a fountain downtown [suggestion from someone else, unclear] No, the one I'm thinking about was right across the street, where our cleaners used to be. I think it's a pawn shop or something now.

[Anne Byrd, Carol Raymond, Tonnette Jackson – Lucy F. Simms School Oral Histories]

Right close to Rock street, there was a fountain there, and I remember it saying, black only and white only. But, as a child, I can honestly say that I don't feel like that I was ever in a situation where I had to deal with that, that ugliness. Now, again, I think it has to do with, you know, just learning to treat people. You know, you had to speak to people, you had to respect elders or adults. And so, it was very different, very different living here and being raised than people living in other places, particularly more South.

Anne Byrd 46:34

Now, I'm older than Tony. I can remember, she said Alfred Neys, Joseph Neys, places like that. But there was McCroys, there was Woolworths. At one time, we could not go and sit at the fountain or at the counter. CVS pharmacy, down where the county building is, there was a CVS pharmacy for a long time, we could not go sit at that fountain.

Tonnette Jackson 47:00

People's Drugstore.

Anne Byrd 47:02

And I can remember, it said "Colored Here", "White Here." As I was coming up, I did see that. But then, you know, I had some encounters when I went to Harrisburg High School, but I took care of that. So I mean, you know, it wasn't anything really bad. But it's just people call you names that you don't like.

Owen Longacre 47:13

Was that student interactions?

Anne Byrd 47:17

Yeah, that was a student.

Owen Longacre 47:18

And then thinking about when you did go to the Harrisonburg City Public Schools, maybe what was your experience like with other students versus maybe the teachers there? And can you speak to that at all?

Anne Byrd 47:42

Well, most of my teachers were fine at Harrisonburg High School. You know, they were there to teach us. They kind of took me under the wing and said, 'you gotta get your lessons' and what have you. I will say this, being here at Simms, when I went to the high school, I felt like I was getting a very good education. But at the time, when I went to Harrisonburg High School, I see that I really was not. Even though the teachers were certified to teach us. Because I went into the ninth grade, going into physics and chemistry, things of that nature. And then I didn't have really a whole science background in order to take those subjects. And they had a set curriculum for you to take when you went to the high school. So, it was not like, 'I want to take this, I want to take that,' you had to take what they offered you basically. Even though we didn't

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have some backgrounds, some things. But I chose the business route, when I went for banking and things like that. So...

Owen Longacre 48:50

Why do you think that difference existed maybe so much? Like you said, you went to Harrisonburg High and it felt very different to you. What do you think maybe the factors were in that? And coming from the Simms School, even though you mentioned that your teachers were very professional, very well respected?

Anne Byrd 49:12

Well, I guess for one thing, you didn't really have a chance to think about it. You were just... you went. And that's what was presented to you, basically.

Tonnette Jackson 49:24

And I think I would say that back in those days, you know, we didn't have the same books and reference materials and resources and probably school budgets and things like that. You know, it was a Black school. I mean, you know, it was the '50s [laughs]. So, we didn't have what the white schools had. We didn't have that. Anywhere in the country, the black schools, nobody had that type of stuff. So, I would say probably, it was a part of racism. Truth will be known, even though no one has probably ever come out and said that. But that's what it was. I mean, I hope that our teachers were just as certified to teach, as you know, other teachers and many of them went on to teach in the schools after integration here in Harrisonburg, but many left.

Owen Longacre 50:25

Well, I wanted to ask about that as well, because what we've studied in our class is that even though desegregation is typically considered to be a positive movement, that there were a lot of unintended consequences, and that even if some things were gained, there were other things that were lost. And I was wondering if any of you could speak to—maybe what did you feel was lost with shutting down Simms School? Even if that might have opened other opportunities? And how did that impact your community as well, since many of the teachers did end up moving away? And can you talk about that at all? Maybe what some of those unintended consequences might have been?

Tonnette Jackson 51:10

I would say—I think I mentioned it before—is probably losing friendships, from students again that ended up going to like Broadway or Turner Ashby or were at Elkton or wherever you'd end up going to school. I would say, I would think that would be one of the bigger impacts. I think losing a lot of your teachers and the fact that they weren't able to move into jobs in the school district in Harrisonburg—and I don't really know any facts about that—but I can pretty much guess that, you know, that there was a race issue involved there. Two of the teachers that—Miss Awkard ended up going— but two of the teachers, Pat Blakey and Barbara Blakey, they were very fair-skinned ladies. In fact, Miss Pat pretty much looked like she was white.

Owen Longacre 52:14

[Anne Byrd, Carol Raymond, Tonnette Jackson – Lucy F. Simms School Oral Histories]

Okay.

Tonnette Jackson 52:15

So I'm sure that's how she ended up at Elkton.

Anne Byrd 52:18

She taught for like 38 years.

Tonnette Jackson 52:20

Right. So she was she stayed in Elkton. She never came back into the Harrisonburg school system, which is kind of crazy, but anyway.

Anne Byrd 52:29

And then Miss [unclear] taught at Spotswood. Miss Awkard started at Waterman and then she ended up going to Spotswood also. And then Miss Blakey went to the high school. So they would only really teach us that...I guess to stay here... [unclear]

Tonnette Jackson 52:38

As far as the community was concerned, I feel like it was a positive. I wouldn't say I felt that way at the time, I don't know if I had a feeling about it at the time. But in the end, like what Anne said, it was a positive. And again, we were all involved with school, we were involved. I was actually the first black cheerleader in Harrisonburg High School. That was like a big deal back then, because you were competing against all the girls that had money, your family has money. So it's kind of like a status thing, you know. And, but like I said, we went to school and we were involved in everything that we could be involved in. And our parents were right there. My parents, my mother was inducted into the hall of fame as a parent because even after we all left, she continued to go to basketball games and whatever she could go to and be involved with, whatever, you know, wanted to do or when they were doing stuff. So, I don't know. Other than probably the friendships, people losing their friendships, I don't feel like it changed our community any. We just had this big old building sitting here and at that time, there was nothing going on here. How did Lucy Simms prepare you for after school?

Anne Byrd 54:16

Well, I can't say that it prepared me, because I kind of took a direction of what I wanted to do, not what the teachers geared you to do. Now Miss Eubanks, she was a mentor in my life, because she would talk to me and tell me things of that nature, guiding me as I was in her class, this that and the other. But she never really said, 'you should become a teacher, you should become a doctor,' or anything like that. You know, it was more like information for me as a person as a student basically. So she was just a great teacher.

Tonnette Jackson 54:56

So now I don't have any fuzzy feelings about any of our teachers, but again I was an elementary student for most of the time. So, I don't, like we were asking our brother about that last night and he would have some fond memories of certain teachers, but he said he was a good student, he

[Anne Byrd, Carol Raymond, Tonnette Jackson – Lucy F. Simms School Oral Histories]

was always an A student. He said, 'I never had to study.' So you know, he would talk to teachers and they would tell him things. But for myself, I don't... I mean, I'm hoping that the education that we got here obviously gave us a basis for moving on when schools intergrated. So, I'm not gonna say that there was no, you know, there was no effect. But as far as teachers inspiring me to do something, I never knew that. I don't feel like I got that.

Anne Byrd 56:01

I mean, you know, just by talking to people about life in general.

Tonnette Jackson 56:06

You got that from your parents too though.

Anne Byrd 56:07

You got that from the parents too, but I think she was just that way. But other than that, it inspired me to go into something though. She never said 'well you need to become a doctor, or you need to become a teacher, or anything like that.' Just I come with my own direction, basically.

Mays Qasem 56:25

When you look back at the Lucy Simms School, what do you feel it's legacy is?

Anne Byrd 56:33

A pillar in the community, basically. Where you got your start, and then things changed as we went on. We had fun [laughs], basically.

Tonnette Jackson 56:52

Well, I think for—I wouldn't use the word colored—it was probably one of the finest schools in the area. Throughout all the counties and stuff. I mean we had, obviously, our parents came here when the building was built and we had a lot of stuff here. Doesn't seem like that now, but it was one of the greatest buildings in our community. And I probably have more of an appreciation for what we're doing today, because of this Lucy F. Simms. But it definitely is, it's a pillar in our community. You know, we like having things here, we like being able to use the building. I mean, we have pictures when the building was being built. My dad went to school here, played basketball here. My mom was actually from Luray. And then she came here and went to school, her 11th and 12th grade [unclear]. Black schools, those days, all go to 12th grade. So the kids had to be dispersed wherever they wanted to get diplomas back then. I don't know the reason for that, but that's how they were. And Luray was one of those places and so kids, some kids went to Northern Virginia, and some kids went the Winchester, and some came here...

Owen Longacre 58:44

I wonder if it wasn't just as simple as, it may be very difficult to obtain a diploma. And maybe putting you said that school didn't go to 12th grade, so they didn't give a diploma...

[Anne Byrd, Carol Raymond, Tonnette Jackson – Lucy F. Simms School Oral Histories]

Tonnette Jackson 58:55

Well, I'm just assuming that you know, probably because they were black schools over in Illinois that got to the tenth grade.

Owen Longacre 59:01

Sure.

Tonnette Jackson 59:01

I'm just guessing. Because, what's the other explanation here? You know.

Anne Byrd 59:09

I was seeing that video that I looked at today, Mr. [Name], his class was the last class of Effinger Street School. And then he went to, yeah the old Effinger Street. And then he was one of the first people that graduated from here in his class. He stayed here. That was interesting to them, just the fact.

Owen Longacre 59:38

Well, we've learned a lot. As we come to a close, I wanted to give you all just any chances to think about anything that you didn't have a chance to share about the school or the community. We've talked about teachers or extracurricular activities. Was there anything on your mind that you felt like we didn't get a chance to touch on, that you wanted to add before we came to a close?

Carol Raymond 1:00:04

I'm just going to throw a piece in there. And you asked the reflection piece about what you feel like the legacy is of this particular spot. I mean, I'm listening to their stories because that's all I have, kind of thing. But I just feel like this building, this community has provided so many people with a foundation that they normally wouldn't have had, had this not existed.

Tonnette Jackson 1:00:29

Yes, that's true.

Anne Byrd 1:00:31

Yes.

Carol Raymond 1:00:32

Even though Miss Lucy Simms never taught here, so to speak, when her name comes up in a conversation, it's nothing but positive. You know, it's nothing but good. Everything that she ever strived for and did in her life was for all of this. And today, many moons later, here we sit, and we're still talking about her legacy in this building and this community. And you know, who knows, had she not existed, or had she gone and taken her expertise somewhere else, would we even be sitting here having this conversation?

Owen Longacre 1:01:16

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She established some deep roots.

Carol Raymond 1:01:18

She did. She did, you know? She helped make this community a true community.

Tonnette Jackson 1:01:24

And I mean, when she started out, there were all these little colored schools, they called them around town. And some of them were actually private schools. And so, what is it called? White Old Road? Somewhere down here in Timberville... And then she taught, like she had a one-room class down on Black's Run. So, in the early days, the girls and boys weren't mixed. It was a girl's school and the boys went to have their own class or whatever. We are all very proud to be from this community. When we go somewhere and people are like, 'Oh, where are you from?' And people say 'Oh, I'm from Richmond..' No, you're not, you're from some county down that no one has heard of. But for me, I always know I'm proud. This is home, we all love coming home. This will always be home to us. And even though we don't really have a black community anymore... That's gone. Which is good, In some ways, this is good. Because all people should be living in one area, you know. And so you know, it's just we had a great— we were raised here and it was good and we all loved it. I don't know anything else to say other than that.

Owen Longacre 1:03:09

And we can see that in how you speak about this community. All very positive.

Tonnette Jackson 1:03:19

So, I walked in the morning to here. So I walk up Johnson Street. So there were like Johnson Street, Kelley Street, Hill Street, what's left of Effinger street, Hawkins Street, and Roy Street. Those were the only streets Black people lived in. This community that was it. Washington Street existed, but Washington Street ended here at the stop sign and then there was a cow pasture on the other side. So, Washington Street was like an alley. It didn't go all the way through back then. And so, I just feel like we're all fortunate because we had a good basis growing up and we had good parents.

Carol Raymond 1:04:10

And we had some white people on Johnson street too. Bunny and Eveyln and all that bunch... They were my friends.

Tonnette Jackson 1:04:22

Well maybe, but when we say the Northeast community for black people, that was it. It was like four streets, that was it. Well the hill, where they built what we call the projects even though I hate using that word. But those were all people that lived down on Effinger Street, so down where the 7 Eleven is, Gay Street. That was a big black community there and then, you know, they tore all those old homes down, down there. And that's how these projects got built. Like you might have someplace to live back in the day. And then Effinger Street School was like where Roses is. And so yeah, I didn't go to Effinger Street School, but my brothers they remember that.

[Anne Byrd, Carol Raymond, Tonnette Jackson – Lucy F. Simms School Oral Histories]

