

Cape Charles Rosenwald School Restoration Initiative
Oral History Interview – December 6, 2014

Jessica Dinkins (interviewer)
Richard Bland (interviewee)
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Sex/Age/Ethnicity/City of Birth/City of Habitation

JD: F; 22 C Leesburg, VA; Virginia Beach, VA
RB: M; # AA Cape Charles, VA; Cape Charles, VA
LS: F; C; Cape Charles, VA

JD: alright uh good afternoon i'm Jessica Dinkins uh i'll be recording this oral history on the afternoon of December sixth two thousand fourteen, if i could first get you to state uh your name uh the years that you attended cape Charles and uhm your age if you're alright with that

RB: my name's Richard Bland i uh attended cape Charles elementary from... uh sixty one... yeah sixty one to... well anyway i went through sixth grade <LAUGH> [JD: <LAUGH>]... i'm a little nervous

JD: don't be don't be

RB: yeah sixty one through sixty six i guess that would be, and uh what was that

JD: uh just your age if you're alright with that <LAUGH>

RB: fifty-nine

JD: alright, well nice to meet you Richard [RB: yes you too] and i'm looking forward to this i think we're gonna have a good time talkin about cape Charles

RB: <SiGH>

JD: <LAUGH> uhm so to start out what are some of your most distinct memories that you have of cape Charles elementary school

RB: strange as it may seem, just playin out in the- there was a big playground [JD: yeah] we'd play out there but we'd also go and sneak off to the woods <LAUGH> [JD: <LAUGH>] play in the woods yeah

JD: when the teachers aren't lookin <LAUGH>

RB: yeah, and was a little swamp out there in the woods that would ice over in the winter and we'd go out there and play like we were ice skating and skate on the ice [JD: <LAUGH>] and uh every once in a while somebody'd fall through and we'd get caught <LAUGH> [JD: <LAUGH>] but uh we had some good times

JD: yeah, that sounds fun

RB: yeah <LAUGH> there was also the city dump right across, and uh, bein kids we'd run out over into the dump and find toys <LAUGH>

JD: of course, boys will be boys [RB: oh yeah] gotta go search for things- anything they can find [RB: INAUDIBLE <LAUGH>] <LAUGH> uhm, there was uh, a couple of people i talked to talked about the uh May Day [RB: oh yeah, yeah] festival, do you remember anything about that

RB: vaguely [JD: vaguely...yeah] yeah, i remember the maypole it seems like—

JD: its just interesting to me cause i never- i've never [RB: oh really] had that- mm mm yeah [RB: <LAUGH>] so it's interesting to me

RB: i just remember maypole but like i said vaguely

JD: yeah... did you have any favorite teachers in the school

RB: mm well all of em, uh... th-there was uh Mrs. Katherine Aimes who was my first nd second grade teacher, uh they had, first second-second third fourth and fifth sixth seventh [JD: mhm] and uh Mrs. Aimes- all of em just seemed uh to care so much about, <MOUTH CLiCK> the kids that uh, yeah i enjoyed all of em [JD: yeah] there was Gloria Harman that was third and fourth grade, and uh, actually fifth grade i left after fifth grade and i can't remember my fifth grade teacher

JD: that's alright we won't hold it against ya <LAUGH>

RB: <LAUGH> but uh, like i said they seemed to really care about kids- want kids to really to go on, they didn't seem to make a whole lot of money, you didn't see em ridin around in new cars or anything <LAUGH> [JD: <LAUGH>] ...but uh they seemed to really care

JD: yeah, in it for the love of the teaching

RB: oh yeah

JD: yeah... did you have a favorite subject while you were there or just school in general

RB: yes math would've been my favorite subject [JD: yeah] just enjoyed the fact that it worked out <LAUGH>

JD: <LAUGH> it all made sense in the end...the answer

RB: <LAUGH> exactly it all made sense...exactly

JD: that's the opposite of me, [RB: oh yeah] i am not a math person whatsoever mm mm...uhm, so what did you think about the overall- you said it seemed the teachers really cared about the students and do you think that contributed, to the overall quality of education that y'all got

RB: oh yeah yes, i uhm- uh, we were talkin about not being negative but...

JD: oh, it's-

(5) RB: we got the uh hand-me-downs usually from the white school [JD: mhm], but uh... they used those books and they uh they taught us from those books and uh, i mean they really gave us what they could from those hand-me-downs [JD: yeah] yeah... so uh, i remember when i went to the white school...that i was a little bit, <LAUGH>, i went from an A and B student to a C and D student [JD: mm] they uh- it was a whole different, the books were harder, i mean... it was newer stuff [JD: yeah] but uh, eventually <LAUGH>...we'd catch up

JD: yeah... what other, differences did you notice when uhm- or do you remember from when the schools consolidated...

RB: i remember a lot of my classmates uh failin that first year <LAUGH> [JD: oh wow], kids that'd been doin well at school and uh cape Charles elementary, uh black cape Charles elementary, uh...<MOUTH CLiCK>...i remember, not being actually accepted at first...after a while kids came around...they would play together during school, then after school, kids didn't know ya [JD: mm], uh, i guess these were some of the things i didn't wanna talk about

LS: it's important history [JD: yeah]

JD: you can talk about whatever- whatever comes to mind, honestly

RB: you said what now

JD: you can talk about anything that [RB: oh okay] comes to mind... happy sad positive negative [RB: <LAUGH>], all of it- all of it is important [RB: yeah..okay] we just wanna hear your story, that's all... uhm, how do you thin- you mentioned the hand-me-down books that y'all got from the other school, are there anyother uh... sort of... thinking back to separate but equal with segregation was there anything that seemed, not very equal [RB: oh yeah] with the- the- the books that you mentioned, what else

RB: oh yeah yeah, well, thank God things have changed a whole lot [JD: mhm] but back then things uh, we were talkin earlier about how the neighborhoods were segregated [JD: mhm] and how the while neighborhood was this end, black neighborhood was up that end,

and uh, we didn't hang around in the white neighborhood <SiGH> [JD: mm]... and uh remember the drug store- goin to the drug store and uh... you weren't supposed to sit at the counter <CAUGH> excuse me, blacks weren't supposed to sit at the counter, uh, i don't know why [JD: yeah...yeah] but anyway...i guess this doesn't have anything to do with the school

LS: but it's part of your life

JD: yeah... there was uhm another person we spoke to who mentioned that, the drug store, and not being able to sit at the counter, it strikes me- it just seems so bazaar to think about [RB: yeah] i mean it's a seat at a counter, what does that have to do with anything

RB: but there were white people there so you couldn't sit there, but uh... yes that's the way it was back then

JD: yeah... was there uhm, any, hostility from the schools between the students or the adults when the schools consolidated <P: 04>

(10) RB: there was...i had one teacher in the seventh grade when i uh, intergrated, when the schools were integrated, and uh, this lady was just... a stone- in my opinion, racist, [JD: mm] i mean she couldn't say the word negro, she had to say nigga- niggars not negros [JD: mm] yeah, and uh, that, i'd sit there and i'd look at her and i'd be angry and i couldn't do anything i'm just a kid sittin in the class [JD: yeah] and uh... never will forget that anger [JD: mm]...

JD: that's, awful to think someone you're supposed to be able to learn from and look up to- a role modle... and uh, well we can move towards happy memories—

LS: can i just ask one more [JD: yeah yeah of course] to stay on that for just a minute, do you think that uhm, black kids were treated, differently from the white kids early on in segregation, and if so how do you think that

RB: in my opinion yes, but uh, they weren't uh...given the attention, i think, that the white kids were mm but uh, we were failin and we couldn't get somebody to help us [JD: but they would help the uh white kids... but uh... this is my opinion

LD: well it was your experience

JD: yeah...

LS: so uhm, do you think more- as a result more black kids failed out

RB: i think so i uh, like i said i remember the first year when we <PHONE RiNG> in the sixth grade uh, like half, kids- the black kids that, had gone with me failed out and uh [JD: oh wow, mm] yeah

LS: so they just left school and-

RB: no no they [LS: they had to repeat] they had to repeat the grade yeah...which was, uh... had they been given more help maybe, they could uh - it's like goin from <LAUGH> elementary school to high school with no middle school no nothing [JD: mhm] but uh i think things could've been better [LS: yeah] to say hey these people aren't, gettin it, lets do some extra work with them

JD: to help- to help them get it [RB: yeah] especially when you make uh... the, not only just the change in the academic setting but the change in, i mean the emotional physical setting changed too [RB: yeah] i'm sure that must've had some sort of affect with going through all that-

LS: social change

RB: yeah yeah

LS: pretty scary i would think

RB: it was it was

JD: mm...was there any, conflict in the town, resulting from integration

RB: mm well, uh, people talked about not sending their kids to the school...but uh, i don't think anything, there wasn't ever any riots of anything like that [JD: mm] but uh, just talks

JD: yeah

LS: so did you go to the Cape Charles School, or, you did

RB: cape Charles, mhm...

JD: well back to... before integration, i love, the collective name...the school over the hump, that title just puts it, i feel like there's so much there with that, do you have any memories about, goin over the hump or, did you walk to school, or did-

RB: we made a song about it

JD: yeah... tell me about that

RB: <LAUGH> yeah... it was uh, it was, yeah i can't

JD: oh

LS: can you say it

RB: it was basically city dump dump dump dump, over the hump hump <LAUGH>

JD: oh no

RB: theres a little more but uh

JD: i guess i didn't think about it that way, i was thinking- i've just heard stories about uhm kids all walkin and playin to school together

RB: yeah yeah

LS: well before you go there though, why did, why did the dump come up in that song

(15) RB: well, the-the school, was there by the dump and uh yeah i-i don't know where we were comin from at the time i just remember us singing that song [LS/JD: uh huh]... i also just thought it was interesting that they put our school <LAUGH>, next door to the city dump...which uh...

JD: just the lacing

RB: yeah

LS: well it's a message

JD: yeah

RB: mhm

JD: an unfortunate one

RB: yeah...

LS: so you were getting to happier things

JD: well i was trying to get to happier memories <LAUGH> [RB: <LAUGH>], well it was one of the ladies that we talked to, she had just happy memories about like physically walking to school and playing with her brother, i think it was Janis, and so i was trying to get to some happy memories like that [LS: INAUDIBLE]

RB: there were times where we would walk over the hump and that was fun [JD: yeah] that way, uh they had this little side thing that uh we would walk across uh...it's like a... just a side walk [JD: mhm] that was incased, well uh you could still see the cars comin by [JD: yeah], but you were separated from vehicles, and uh, it was fun walkin over there and, go down on the railroad track and play sometimes

JD: getting into mischief again [RB: oh yeah <LAUGH>] like playin in the woods <LAUGH>

RB: no there were a lot of uh good times goin in, and talent contest at the school

JD: oh yeah

RB: yeah

JD: did you partake in the talent condense

RB: no no no <LAUGH> but uh, can i call names

JD: i don't see why not, yeah

RB: i just remember one particular talent show that uh, David Trial... played piano and sang, and they played rock around the clock <LAUGH> [LS: <LAUGH>] [JD: yeah] they had the whole place callin out, and uh that was so fun

JD: yeah... oh that sounds fun, did you uhm- did you ever go to or were you in the Christmas plays

RB: i don't think i participated i can't remember

JD: how was uhm your relationship- or the communities relationship like uh with teachers and students outside of school did you see them around town, and was there a-

RB: oh yeah, you mean uh teachers from the- [JD: mhm] oh yeah, Mrs. Aimes lived like a block away from me and uh, she was, she knew my grandmother well- i was raised by my grandpaents and uh she'd tell me in a minute i'm gon tell Ruth <LAUGH> [JD: <LAUGH>] you keep doin in school im gonna tell Miss Ruth, but uh <MOUTH CLiCK> so they kept us in line

JD: do you think family- the family support had a big role in-in- with education [RB: oh yeah] was family and education very intertwined

RB: it was good uh... you'd uh, if you got in trouble at school you got in trouble at home so uh [JD: mhm] back then they could beat you <LAUGH> you'd get a whoopin at school [JD: <LAUGH>] you'd get home and you got one when you got home too, but uh...lookin back on it- it was- it was good

JD: yeah...[RB: but uh] do you think- oh sorry go a head,

RB: probably kept me out of a lot of trouble

JD: do you think that's around today or do you think it's changed,

RB: i think it's changed, changed a whole lot...uhm... kids today seem kinda just... no respect <LAUGH> uh pretty much, lots control of em [JD: yeah] <P:05> but uh... i uh i don't mean to be a Debbie downer

LS: no

JD: no you're fine

LS: you're not the only person who's said that

(20) JD: yeah that's part of why i asked [RB: <LAUGH>], uhm was there a big uh, connection with support from the church with the school or did religion play an aspect [RB: oh yeah] yeah...

RB: uh... uh, yeah... church was a big thing, you had to go to church on Sunday [JD: mhm]... uh, and uh... i do remember being in church programs

JD: oh yeah

RB: yeah

JD: tell me about that a little bit,

RB: mmm...<THROAT CLEAR> recite poems and different things i can remember, bein in the play, Elijah, and uh...that was some good times [JD: yeah] yeah, but those things got you, prepared for school they helped you with school

JD: mhm, seems like it goes right with that community surrounding [RB: oh yeah] yeah,

LS: so, did uhm, what about in the school, were there prayers in the [RB: there were yeah] school, was there a connection

RB: first thing in the morning uh, what did they call it... but anyway we would pray, we would recite the pledge of allegiance, uh... and that was our- usually- yeah every morning i think we had, i'll think of whatever it was when i leave <LAUGH>

JD: of course, that's how it happens

RB: but uh, i think that was good to- to get the day started, started the day off right

JD: can you, take me through- you said the prayers st—happened in the morning, [RB: mhm]can you take me through what a day would be like in the school, like your typical schedule or, if you remember

RB: again we're talkin fifty years or better [JD: <LAUGH>] <LAUGH> but uh... <SiGH> i almost had it, but then it went

LS: so you start of with you come- you walked to school- did you always walk to school

RB: not always we had uh... if you missed the bus you ended up walking to school

LS: so there was a bus at some point...when you went to school

RB: we- it wasn't- yeah, i think they had a bus the whole time i was there, believe

LS: cause i think some of the people who went earlier [JD/RB: mhm] they did have that [JD: they didn't have a bus] they either had to walk or some parent would drive [JD: yeah] them if the weather was really awful [RB: right] they'd have to walk in the rain or snow or whatever <LAUGH> [JD: cold hot] so there- there was a bus...

RB: yeah

LS: so you get there

RB: okay, you get there and you'd have uh our morning thing and, uh... do our classes, we'd get a little break to go out and play and get exercise and...and come back and do more classes and have lunch...classes and we'd go home

JD: yeah

RB: and uh<P: 06> uh i do remember uh...when presedent kennedy died and uh... they let us out early that day [JD: mhm] ... and uh that sticks out in my mind [LS: mhm] [JD: mhm] yeah, uh <P: 04>

JD: do you, uh i'm thinking back to my own experience i was probably about, your age when kennedy was assassinated for when nine eleven happened [RB: oh okay] and um... i just remember not really like fully comprehending like i was all excited to get out of school early then when i was told why, it was like, this...really bazaar feeling [RB: <LAUGH>] do you remember any of that

(25) RB: i can remember...the sadness and everybody was really [JD: mhm]... and uh, i could i remember, Walter Cronkite breaking in the announcement and then i really knew this is something <LAUGH> [JD: yeah] this guy is never off his game you know [JD: mm] but uh... yeah i do remember that [JD: yeah] <P: 07> but uh... and getting to the lighter stuff <LAUGH>

JD: <LAUGH> i know, seems like we've been uh [RB: yeah we kinda eh] pretty drab here

LS: well it's all- it's all history [JD: yeah] well one of the things that is is always interesting is to hear a little bit about like your, family, what did your dad do what did your mom do uhm

JD: did you have siblings

RB: no

LS: no brothers and sisters, okay... what does your dad do

RB: my dad worked construction, uh... and uh... he and my mother separated when i was, about ten i guess [JD: hm] and uh i stayed with my grandparents so... my mother i guess was a housewife...

JD: did y'all live in town

RB: yes

JD: where did you live

RB: five thirty seven Plum Street [<JD: LAUGH>] <LAUGH> and uh... i don't know if y'all are familiar with it

LS: sure

JD: do you have any memories about things that you do in town, just things that you'd do with your friends or in the summers

RB: oh yes sometimes we'd go down to the beach, play and, walk around the town, there wasn't a whole lot of <LAUGH> places to go or things to do we made the best of what we had

JD: yeah... they beach would be my favorite

RB: big deal was goin down town on Saturday and just watchin the people <LAUGH>

JD: oh yeah, people watchin

RB: yeah people would shop and doin whatever

JD: mm sounds nice

LS: so did you go to the movies

RB: went to the movies, an there was a uh black theater in my early days, back uh, on Jefferson Avenue, and uh later we started goin to the palace <THROAT CLEAR> and uh used to enjoy the movies

JD: so they had—they integrated the movie theater as well

RB: yeah uh this was uh... im kinda fuzzy on when that happened

LS: so was it fully integrated or did you have to sit in separate areas of the theater

RB: i think we sat in our groups, blacks set with black and whites set with whites

LS: but not like—cause i remember somebody telling us that we—that they at least in their era had to sit upstairs

RB: oh really

LS: uh huh

RB: no i never did that...i don't even think the upstairs was open when i was a kid

JD: do you remember when things...changed, when they fully integrated, like—like not to have to sit like in the movie theater when you had to sit in different sections or, when did things start to truly integrate and not just theoretically

LS: when could you sit at the lunch counter at Rayfields for example

RB: Savages then <LAUGH>

LS: oh seventies [JD: yeah]

RB: no Savages then

LS: oh oh Savages oh sorry not Rayfields

RB: yeah...but uh i was in my teens i guess [JD: yeah] uh yeah fourteen fifteen maybe

JD: was that a kind of slow process or did it happen

RB: yeah it was

LS: yeah it was slow

RB: yeah over the years it kind of got, more and more, yeah

JD: yeah...

LS: so what did you-- so you graduated from Northampton High School, no

RB: no i graduated from Cape Charles

LS: from Cape Charles [RB: mhm] okay, and what did you do after that

(30) RB: went into the navy, did four years in the navy, came home, took a welding course i was gonna be a welder, but uh they had this stick weld and the smoke would get in ya nose [JD: mm] and be blowin black smoke out, decided i don't wanna do this <LAUGH>

JD: yeah i don't blame you

RB: and uh a friend of mine told me that there was an opening at the bridge so i ended up getting a job down there, been there ever since...

JD: yeah,

RB: yeah,

JD: well there ya go...

RB: thirty five years now hopefully, three more <LAUGH>

JD: yeah, so don't pull me over when i'm goin over the bridge down <LAUGH>

RB: i wont but uh, one of my—one of my guys might <LAUGH>

JD: <LAUGH> no i watch my speed on the bridge [LS: yeah <LAUGH>] [RB: okay good] ...if it says strictly enforced i am strictly at fifty-five <LAUGH> [RB: <LAUGH yeah>] do you still keep in touch with any of your classmates from Cape Charles Elementary

RB: every now and the i run into somebody an uh yeah, but uh as far as uh, callin em or writin or [JD: yeah] whatever <BACKGROUND WHiSTLiNG> <P: 04>

JD: did you have a favorite teacher

RB: at the-

LS: -elementary school

RB: it would have to be Mrs. Catherine Ames [LS: yeah] yeah she was just such a, sweet, good person

JD: i heard a lot about her

RB: oh you have

JD: yeah well

LS: many people have mentioned her [JD: yes]

RB: for good reason

JD: yeah

LS: did you know Alice Brown, was she there

RB: she wasn't there [LS: no—okay] when i was there

LS: she was – she had moved on i think to uh one of the other schools in the county uhm, [RB: yeah] i think she went to the middle school, people talk about her and Mr. Nottingham a lot—

JD: oh yeah they talk about Mr. Nottingham [RB: yeah]

LS: was he there

RB: i'm trying to think if he was the fifth grade teacher

LS: i think he taught [JD: he taught math] the higher levels

RB: okay

JD: yeah

LS: and i know he taught math

RB: yeah, memory's fuzzy

LS: that's okay [RB: <LAUGH>]

JD: mine too trust me sometimes i can't remember [RB: you're too young] oh trust me it still happens [RB: <LAUGH>] <LAUGH> i can't remember what i had for breakfast half the time

LS: i would hate to think if someone was grilling me about my elementary school experiences <LAUGH> oh

RB: <LAUGH> ... that's an interesting tattoo what is it

JD: its uhm, an anchor with this is a a compass with the world inside of it and a sparrow [RB: mhm] and it has half of the coordinates for Leeds it's the city in England that i lived in a few years ago [RB: oh okay] and my uh good friend who is German she has the same design with the other half of the coordinates and uhm it's—it's our—Leeds North of my home and West of hers so it's kind of like our-our point in the middle, and then the whole image itself has a whole lot of other meaning for traveling and whatnot

RB: you like to travel

JD: i love to travel

RB: okay, sound like my daughter [JD: yeah] yeah

JD: how old's she

RB: thirty one

JD: oh okay

RB: yeah she loves to travel...

LS: so do you have any other children

RB: got uh thirty one thirty three, and uh, Sharon's thirty five

LS: isn't that scary when they <LAUGH>

JD: <LAUGH>

RB: wow <LAUGH>

LS: so what do they do [RB: uh] you have three daughters yeah,

RB: uh my oldest is in Honduras and [JD: oh wow] married a Honduran and shes a house keeper... house wife uh... my uh, little son – the son is little [LS: oh okay] he's uh in Annandale [JD: oh] works for a defence contractor, he a computer engineere and uh the baby Beth, shes the baby <LAUGH> [JD: <LAUGH>] but anyway she uh...i'm not quite sure what she does <LAUGH> [JD: <LAUGH>] but she's uh, she's an attourney

LS: so they all went to college and,

(35) RB: well two did, [LS: two yeah] the oldest didn't

JD: i uh, speaking of traveling, and Honduras, i love Nicaragua

RB: oh really

JD: yeah i've been there gosh three or four times

RB: i wanna go see my daughter this coming year hopefully

JD: yeah it's beautiful, yeah...

RB: how bout the language cause i've been tryin [LS: learn Spanish] to learn Spanish

JD: it's—i was very much more close to, fluent when i was going there, i've not had—i've not had means to speak it nor have i studied it in, gosh, four years [RB: oh okay] so i'm not any more but it is i mean they- the people there are so warm and th- if youre trying to speak the language [RB: they'll work with you] they'll work with you, absolutely [RB: okay] yeah they're very warm hearted people [RB: good]

LS: so have you had grandchildren,

RB: got two <CLEAR THROAT> and uh... the baby iss, four, Breez, and Tahj is ten or will be ten in January, he's nine <LAUGH> <BACKGROUND WHISTLING> and yeah Tahj is nine and Breez is four, and Breez is the youngest daughter's

JD: okay, where does she live i- i- forgot

RB: she's in Charlottesville

JD: oh okay, do they come back and visit often

RB: they were here for Thanksgiving [JD: okay]... not often they come back

JD: yeah, and they grew up in Cape Charles

RB: yeah, oh no- no Eastville

JD: oh okay, where is that in

LS: that's just the next town up basically [RB: eight miles] well Cheriton and then Eastville, Cheriton is [JD: where th] well actually where Odel Collins's is- is kinda Eastville right

RB: yes

LS: so its- the town of Eastville itself is across the highway from Odell's - where Odell's house is [JD: oh okay]but it you know the Eastville areas [JD: right] is right down there so and it's the county seat [JD: oh okay]

RB: court house [LS/JD: mhm] and all that

LS: so do you live on the west side or the east in Eastville itself- itself, or just outside,

RB: oh the west side

LS: so one of your daughters took after your wife [RB: yeah <LAUGH>], his wife's an attorney

JD: oh okay

END: 0:38:26