Margie Campbell
Interview with Mrs. Vera Allen
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Tape number 1

Margie Campbell: Ok now just for the tape I’m going to go ahead and introduce myself again. My name is Margie Campbell and today is November 14, 2003 and I am interviewing Mrs. Vera Allen. Mrs. Allen could you tell me a little bit about yourself and where you grew up?

Vera Allen: I grew up in Charles City Virginia below Richmond. I went to school off somewhere and then I got here, I married that’s how I got here. I’m not a native, I married a native.

Margie Campbell: Ok, a native of Prince Edward County?

Vera Allen: Yes, yes from here.

Margie Campbell: ok, where and when did you go to college?

Vera Allen: I went to college at Virginia State College in Petersburg. All four years right straight after I finished high school.

Margie Campbell: Can you tell me a little bit about your college?

Vera Allen: Well, it was the only college that in in the state of Virginia that we could go to. It’s, it’s operated by the state of Virginia. And after we finished high school that’s the only place we could go, or else go other states and that was too much for us because we were just ordinary working people and and it was all right with us I was glad to go there, you know, cause a lot of people weren’t going to college at that time. And my mother and father had decided that I was going. And I, I worked with him all during high school there was [inaudible word] work and then he finished his work he just sent people on to college and I went straight on to school. I liked it very much. Laughed.

Margie Campbell: When did you know you wanted to be a teacher?

Vera Allen: Well that was about the only thing that at that time that we could do. The only thing, the only kind of training that we could do.

Long pause

Margie Campbell: and when did you begin teaching?

Vera Allen: What year you mean? Or how old was I? I guess I guess I’ll say I finished college in 1935. I’m way up there, and I have my class key. And after that I went to work. I roomed with
a girl whose mother was a principal and she took me into her school and I worked with her and that was in Albemarle County in Charlottesville. I liked it very much. But I didn’t know of anything else I wanted to do, I hadn’t though of anything else. Neither had my parents thought of anything else.

Margie Campbell: Did you teach at any other schools?

Vera Allen: Yes, I taught in Albemarle County, and then I taught in my own county which was Charles City a year or so. And then after that I went went to North Carolina when schools here closed I went to North Carolina worked down there for about five years, and I liked it very much. But I wanted to come back home and so I’ve been in Virginia ever since, only...yes, I’ve been in no other county but Virginia. No other state but Virginia.

Margie Campbell: Um, were you teaching during the Brown decision? When the Brown decision was handed down?

Vera Allen: yes.

Margie Campbell: Where were you teaching?

Vera Allen: I was in North Carolina. I went to North Carolina.

Margie Campbell: Oh so you weren’t in...

Vera Allen: Goldsboro, North Carolina

Margie Campbell: and what were your feelings about the Brown decision?

Vera Allen: well we thought of course it was terrible. Um, laughter. But there was nothing else we could do. We had had problems as a race and there wasn’t anything else we could do. And and my mother and father wanted me to work, wanted me to be a teacher. And they had sacrificed a lot to put me through school. There were six children and I was the first one that went to college, but I wanted I knew I wanted to be a teacher cause that was all I knew. I knew I’d be a good teacher and I liked it very much. I see some of my children right here now, I went to uh, something at our church the other Sunday and there were two young men there and I said uh, I walked up to them and each one of them knew me, remembered you know that I had taught them. Called me right by name and it had been about a year since I had seen them. What very nice young men. Course they didn’t go to college, but they went, they were good church, they were church people and this occasion was a church affair at our church.

Margie Campbell: it is always nice when students come back

Vera Allen: yeah, that’s right.

Margie Campbell: what year did you move back to Prince Edward?
Vera Allen: I’m not sure I’d have to think about that.

Margie Campbell: were you in Prince Edward at the time of the strike at the Moton School?

Vera Allen: yes my daughter was in it.

Margie Campbell: your daughter went to the Moton school?

Vera Allen: yeah she walked out with the children. I was teaching in here and I was teaching at the school that was across on the other side of the highway. The school that they walked out of is this one right here. But then my other my second daughter, I have two children, and my second daughter was in the elementary in the school there and she didn’t finish elementary school but my other daughter had.

Margie Campbell: How did integration of the schools affect you personally?

Vera Allen: pauses. I don’t know, uh...I guess by that time we [inaudible words] somewhere but we did not mix very much. Of course my father and my mother tried to not have me mix so much and so that our attitudes towards them would be good, you know? Pauses...We accepted it the best we could there’s nothing else we could do, you know? But I, I had made some very good friends when I worked in Charlottesville. Was a very good place to work over there the university there was a very good place to work. They were very receptive to what we were doing and the woman I lived with was the principal of the school and she was a brave, strong woman and she helped us adjust to it. I accepted it because it was all we had, all we could do.

Margie Campbell: So would you say that the attitudes in North Carolina were completely different from the attitudes in Virginia?

Vera Allen: I thought so, yes. And I lived with a family and the lady that I lived with was a teacher. And uh, I guess they were very nice people to live with and, they didn’t have any family but that one that was in the household that same household and then the mother died and left the daughter and they left me everything else. The [inaudible words] and everything they had there.

Margie Campbell: And after integration happened did you come back to Virginia to teach?


Margie Campbell: Can you describe the school you were teaching in a little bit and how it was after integration?

Vera Allen: two room school, two teachers. One with the upper grades and one with the lower grades. We got along very well and the children got along very well. They didn’t seem to have any ill feelings at all toward anybody; you know, they were just so glad to go to school. We hadn’t had good schools before and we were just so glad to have schools back and we got along very well I thought. No problems at all and then after I married I kept on teaching, I had two babies, and then [inaudible words]
Margie Campbell: Can you remember how other teachers or administrators at your school felt about integration? Anything they said?

Vera Allen: Yeah well there were some feelings about it; you know...we figured that we should have had better circumstances. All of us did. Some a little more bitter than others but some of us wanted to go to college and wanted to be so we stuck with it. And my father and mother wanted me to stay with it too. And my father didn’t want me to have any ill feelings about it but he wanted me to be a teacher and he spent his money to make me a teacher and he wanted me to, to be strong and he just didn’t...if he had any ill feelings he didn’t show them but he didn’t want us to be a part of it. He didn’t want us to have ill feelings because he wanted us...and we kept ill, we kept good feelings. I can see him now and he just, just told us then to come on you go to school and you’re going to be a teacher and you’re going to...you’re going to work here. But then after I uh, married I didn’t particularly always want to stay right here but I had to I didn’t have anywhere else to go.

Margie Campbell: Have you retired?

Vera Allen: Have I? Yeah a long time ago.

Margie Campbell: What year did you retire?

Vera Allen: hmm...I don’t really remember... pauses...now lets see. I retired...[in 1980]

Margie Campbell: Yes m’am.

Vera Allen: yeah yeah that key I can show that, I can prove that. I really got my class key. And not many people have them still but I still have mine. I used to wear it some I don’t wear it anymore. I keep it where I can see it in case my family wants it for anything it’s right on my dresser, all the time.

Margie Campbell: And when did you retire from teaching?

Vera Allen: well lets see I retired from teaching, I guess that was [1980.]

Margie Campbell: When you retired from teaching or when you finished college?

Vera Allen: retired from [inaudible words] let’s see...long time ago...retired from teaching. I guess around 69 or 65. Long time.

Margie Campbell: How do you think school systems have changed since the time of integration?

Vera Allen: I think they’ve learned to accept us better, somewhat better. And I think the school system is a little bit better in accepting us, we feel better about it anyway. But we kept it to ourselves and stayed with the system. When I uh, lets see when I, I...my mother and father kept
us close to the situation and we didn’t have any feelings, bad feelings, when we were able when I was able to retire. And we were glad to sort of move out of it.

Margie Campbell: and how have racial relations in this area changed since integration?

Vera Allen: in Farmville you mean?

Margie Campbell: uh huh.

Vera Allen: I don’t know that they’ve changed a lot. I have a daughter who taught, teaches at Longwood. You know Edna? [She taught at Longwood for 25 years and plans to retire this year.]

Margie Campbell: no I haven’t had a class with her, but I have heard of her.

Vera Allen: well that was uh that was a strange thing for her. When they offered her to work there the first time we didn’t let her go because we didn’t feel she was ready to go into that kind of a situation. But the next year when one of the professors from Hampton, from Longwood came over we just told her go ahead and she’s been there, she’s getting ready to retire right now. But my other daughter, didn’t teach over there she lived in California for awhile, she married in New York and she didn’t wanna teach over there but she’s lived in New York but when she came back here she taught some here but not much. But she was married and Edna, Edna didn’t have children this one in the state here had a couple children.

Margie Campbell: Now you said you’re oldest daughter was part of the walkout at the Moton school...

Vera Allen: yeah

Margie Campbell: ...and you’re other daughter was in the elementary school. How did that affect them during their schooling? Did they lose a couple years of school? Did you take them with you to North Carolina?

Vera Allen: No I didn’t take them with me. We just stayed together, uh...Edna was in the elementary school they just stood at the window and looked at the children walk down the street so they have uh, emphasized the march again since then cause Edna went to go to it, but she came back here and they marched down the street again and set on the court steps there. But Edwilda the oldest girl did it each time. And she hasn’t been back since.

Margie Campbell: How do you think that had an effect on your children?

Vera Allen: well it it it gives us a strange feeling. A feeling of not wanting...not being wanted and not being as good as they were...not enough to keep us a part of the situation. But we kept on going anyway. And I worked in North Carolina a few years and I came home just weekends with the children and their daddy was living then. And we came home too, course he died soon after that and I had the children by myself. I’ve had them ever since. But he didn’t...he was
strong with it but he didn’t seem to be angry with anybody he uh...he kept going. He stayed, stuck with him. Course in school we always laugh about it that he tried to do all the things that other people were doing. When Halloween came and they had to have costumes and we always laugh at that. He would put them around and go on the street and buy costumes for them and let them walk on the street. But he didn’t get mad with them or anything but he just walked behind them. Everybody knew who they were. All the other children you didn’t nobody know who they were cause their parents weren’t there, but his children he’s walking with his. We got, we always laugh about that one. So we just made the best of it we could. It’s been a tough road, been a lot of places, and not being able to understand why you had to be so different you went there just the same...didn’t always like it. We went there just the same.

Margie Campbell: Can you think of anything that might have made integration easier?

Vera Allen: that would have made it easier? I don’t know. It was a personal thing. I don’t know that I can think of anything that would have made it easier. But my father and mother were always there with us and my mother had been to college so um, she could help me. But they were intelligent people they were very proud of their children and they wanted their children to have what other children had, the best of everything. And my daddy always stuck with us. They were good parents and we wanted what other children had. We didn’t always get it but we made out without anyhow, so...

Margie Campbell: It’s really wonderful that you had such strong, supportive parents.

Vera Allen: yes. Yes. That’s right. Parents who stood up for their children. They wanted their children educated like other children. They wanted to have the best in life. My father and mother just stuck to it all the time. My father worked over in Hopewell. He just wasn’t with us during the week; he was just with us weekends. And he would come home on weekends, but he always arranged for us to have the best of everything. We even had a car. He gave us a car to have at home cause we lived a long ways from high school. High school was at one end of the county and we lived at the other end and he wanted us to have the best. And he always had it there for us. We could never go anywhere in the car unless two of us went. And some of the neighbors would go with us sometimes. And that was what we had to put up with.

Margie Campbell: Are there any other comments you’d like to add about integration or education?

Vera Allen: I think…I don’t know. I think education is, has improved some for us, but uh, and I don’t know that we would have been any better off had we all come along together cause there had to be a situation that everybody was agreeable on. Daddy left us that car at home in case we had to go to the high school for anything, for games or anything we could go but not a lot of children had it. And we thought that he put a whole lot into it so that we wouldn’t feel so bad about it, but sometimes we did. Pause. But they were very very strong parents. Have you ever lived in integration?

Margie Campbell: No, I was born after integration.
Vera Allen: yeah uh huh. Where are you from?

Margie Campbell: I'm originally from Chesapeake Virginia.

Vera Allen: Oh yeah I know that area. That's good country down there in Chesapeake.

Margie Campbell: uh huh much different than Farmville.

Vera Allen: laughs, yeah, laughs, yes. Have you ever...had better schools and maybe I guess [inaudible word]

Margie Campbell: All right well Mrs. Allen thank you very much for sharing your story with me.

Vera Allen: I hope it helped. Laughs. Ok.

End of tape.