



THE ALEXANDRIA ORAL HISTORY CENTER
OFFICE OF HISTORIC ALEXANDRIA
CITY OF ALEXANDRIA



Oral History Interview

with

Rosa Byrd

Interviewer: *Francesco De Salvatore*

Narrator: *Rosa Byrd*

Location of Interview:

Rosa Byrd House, 203 Wesmond Drive, Alexandria, VA 22305

Date of Interview: *05/11/2023*

Transcriber: *Paul Birdsall*

Summary:

Rosa Byrd reflects on a lifetime of devotion to community activism and family, as well as the deep connection she and her family share with the city of Alexandria.

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INTRODUCTION

Rosa Byrd [00:00:00] My name is Rosa Byrd. I am 79 years old. Today is May 11, 2023 and my address is 203 Wesmond Drive, Alexandria, Virginia.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:00:14] Great. My name is Francesco De Salvatore. It's May 11th, 2023, and we were at Ms. Bird's home over at 203 Wesmond Drive. Hi, Ms. Byrd.

Rosa Byrd [00:00:28] How's—? I can't say your name.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:00:31] What?

Rosa Byrd [00:00:31] I don't know how to say your name.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:00:34] Francesco.

Rosa Byrd [00:00:35] Hi, Francesco.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:00:36] Or Cesco.

Rosa Byrd [00:00:38] Cesco. I like Cesco. That's friendlier. Yes.

GROWING UP IN WEST VIRGINIA

Francesco De Salvatore [00:00:42] So, yeah, I want to start from the beginning. So where does your life start?

Rosa Byrd [00:00:47] Oh, my life started in Logan County, West Virginia. My father was there working in the coal mines at that time.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:01:02] Mm hmm. So, can you talk more about growing up in West Virginia. What was it like?

Rosa Byrd [00:01:08] Okay, well, there was a coal mining camp. And at that time, as young as I was, I realized there were economically deprived people living together. All blacks and whites live close together. That same kind of housing put in by the coal companies. So I just knew we had a normal life until I started school in first grade. And I gave the teacher my last name and it was Banks, but all the siblings above me, their surnames were Miller, and I thought they had put down the wrong name at school. So when I went home was the first time my mom explained to me that she had a husband that died. Then she met my father and got married and there were five children from our group of children and four from the earlier group. So there was nine children in our family.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:02:08] Wow. Wow. That must have been a big reveal.

Rosa Byrd [00:02:12] Yes, there was. I was really young. I was in the first grade. They didn't have kindergarten back then, but it was okay cause, you know, I loved them all anyway. I just thought they had made a mistake because I thought I was the smartest one, even at five, than they were, so.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:02:29] That's cool. How did your family end up in West Virginia? How did that happen?

Rosa Byrd [00:02:35] Well, because again, my mother. Her husband died. He got killed on the railroad while working in West Virginia.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:02:44] Your mother's first—?

Rosa Byrd [00:02:46] Her first husband. He got— who was killed in the accident from a rock falling.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:02:52] What was his name?

Rosa Byrd [00:02:52] Miller was his name. And he was there working. And so she'd gone there, she'd been there anyway. There were no—again, in Halifax County, where we were—there were no jobs. Uh, Campbell County, where we were. They went there because at that time the coal mines were flourishing. But that didn't last too long either. And then we relocated back to Virginia.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:03:23] Got it. And so what are some of your memories from growing up in West Virginia?

Rosa Byrd [00:03:28] Well, I didn't have that many memories. That one about my family was about the biggest one I have more memories of. I do know that my family transferred back here. I stayed in West Virginia with another uncle for two years, and when I came down here I was in, like, the fifth grade.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:03:50] Fifth grade. Where did your family move to Virginia?

Rosa Byrd [00:03:55] When they first came back from West Virginia, they lived in a camp in Pittsburgh County, Pennsylvania County, Virginia. And my father came down there to be a sharecropper. And I found out what that meant. And we won't get on that topic today because sharecropping is just one step above slavery. I've had several conversations about it, but I learned a lot during the time my father was sharecropping. We had a family of nine. I told you, the people that own the land had one child and the parents, and they got half of the crop that we made. We didn't have money to buy fertilizers and everything. So he get another third of that. And every year we went deeper in the hole because there was no money, cash, coming in to help us. So, my father didn't do that very long. The older children left home and then those of us, as we graduated, we had a mini migration to Alexandria, Virginia. Not like the Great Migration, but my brothers went to Baltimore and my sisters still live there. But the five children by the first husband all came to Alexandria and we all live around in this community.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:05:29] Got it. What are some of your memories growing up in Pittsburgh County and—sorry, Pennsylvania County and...?

Rosa Byrd [00:05:38] Well, everybody—

Francesco De Salvatore [00:05:39] Cause you were there from fifth grade into your—

Rosa Byrd [00:05:41] Into—well, from fifth grade, yeah. Until I got married and came here. Well, everybody in the area were sharecroppers. So there weren't very many people—Black people—that owned their own land. But there was a difference in the owners, the sharecropping families. Some families worked and paid their members on the sharecropping families. Well, the others were abusive and getting cheated out of their money. So then after that, I think that was it.

MEMORIES OF FATHER AND MOTHER

Francesco De Salvatore [00:06:22] What was your father's name?

Rosa Byrd [00:06:23] Osmond Banks. James Osmond Banks.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:06:29] What are some of your favorite memories with your father?

Rosa Byrd [00:06:33] Well, as I'd gotten older, I realized that all of us had nicknames. And for me, that seemed sort of a loving family. He called me Boots, and I don't know why, but all nine of us had nicknames, and it carries on up until today. My sister, the younger sister was called Ellen. I mean, was called Sue. Well, one joke we always tell in our family. I mentioned to you before that the people, the racist black and white people that was old at that time, and they all would get to work after the coal mine closed and drink. But my father said the white people were all right. And when you were having fun. But when you hear them holler, "ooh-ha." He said they were getting too drunk. Then you had to go home. It was going to be a fight. So they were friends as long as they were sober, but not when they get too much alcohol, I guess. And I was a little girl. But I could remember that.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:07:43] And your mother. What was her name?

Rosa Byrd [00:07:46] Her name was Mae Katherine Banks. And she was a petite little woman to have nine children. I love the fact that even when, I told you, we found out that we had different fathers, we weren't allowed to use the name "half brothers, half sisters, half sibling." That was a no-no in our house. And it was that way, you know, up till today. So we—our family—was close. Still close, as a matter of fact.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:08:17] That's great.

Rosa Byrd [00:08:18] Mm hmm.

IMPORTANCE OF FAMILY

Francesco De Salvatore [00:08:19] Why? Why do you think that? Like, what makes your family so close? What keeps you guys close?

Rosa Byrd [00:08:26] Well, I guess because there were nine of us. And then, when you're working on the farm, you work together in the summer, you go to school together and all that. But I think even after we got married and we go back home, we've had family reunions. At the pandemic, it was our 34th year. I haven't counted up then. But every summer we would go and have family reunions. Oh, my sisters' children. So not only do I know my nieces and nephews, I know my grand nieces and nephews, and they know who I am. Well, I think that's important as far as our family is concerned. Yeah.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:09:12] What does family mean to you?

Rosa Byrd [00:09:14] Everything. Actually, family means everything. It doesn't mean that we're not different. And people have different ways. We have different lifestyles. Different ways you get along. But you do know that from the oldest (who's turning 90 in September) and to me, down to the youngest one, he's 76 or 75 or something. But almost every day we talk to each other. The siblings or my brother, they call my husband, "brother." And sometimes he'll call here and say "talk to my brother" and then talk to my husband and hang up. I had to call him back and ask him does he realize who he's related to in this house? Yep.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:10:06] And who were role models? Like growing up? Like, who were people that you looked up to or that really had an impact on you?

Rosa Byrd [00:10:15] Because of the family, my sister, she was like a second mother. And my brother was like the second father in the house. My sister had the right to spank us or whatever if we got in trouble. She's the one that took you to school on your first day of school. She was the second mother because my mother unfortunately had cancer. And she found it out when she was in West Virginia, had cancer in the roof of her mouth. And health care wasn't good for most people, and it was even worse for African-American people. So at one point in her life, before we moved down here, she had an operation. They went in and—they had a professional name for it, I don't know—but they took the roof of her mouth. That's where the cancer was. They took that out and then made her a dental plate that created the roof of her mouth. And from then on, she lived a normal life, but she had that. She was really like a guinea pig with them because they hadn't performed that type of surgery before. Mhm.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:11:43] So she was diagnosed with cancer when you were growing up?

Rosa Byrd [00:11:46] Yes. But she lived until she was 90. Got to go to a whole lot of those family reunions.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:11:55] What was your mom like?

Rosa Byrd [00:11:57] She was very strict, um, and I know—well, I have to say what I would have thought of her when I was young, and then when I got to be grown in a mother myself, because she had to have been scared in her lifetime. You have that many small children, you're seriously sick, and you don't have lots of money. So as we got older and we listened to her in her life, then that made me, I can speak for myself, made me a better person. And even a better daughter, too. And one of the things I forgot to put on our paper: when we did leave from there and I was married and came here with Jack, I had worked on Herb Harris's campaign. He was a representative in the House of Congress. She would go back to the medical college of Richmond maybe every six months or so, until she got to the point that they said she was cured from the cancer.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:13:13] And so you were in Virginia or—you were in Pennsylvania County until you got married. So—?

Rosa Byrd [00:13:22] Well, not Pennsylvania. The first place we moved when we came down was Pennsylvania County. That was the first year we tried sharecropping. At that time, my oldest brother had graduated high school before they came down and my father was happy because he had all these children that he figured could work on the farm. But the first sharecropping owner that he went to had a boy younger than my oldest brother, and the first confrontation they had, they wanted my oldest brother to call him Mr. Billy, by his name. Well, we weren't having that. So my brother stayed there the rest of that year, and then he left and went to Baltimore and got a job. But it was things like that. It's not just the hard work with sharecropping, it's the way you're treated and that you're not really valued. So my dad stopped that and he got a job at a saw mill doing lumber. And you get paid a salary like, you know, other people. And that's what he was doing clean on up till I left home.

MOVE TO ALEXANDRIA

Francesco De Salvatore [00:14:47] And so how did you end up in Alexandria?

Rosa Byrd [00:14:49] My husband, he was there. He lived over in the next county, and there were no jobs there for people. His family didn't sharecrop, but his father worked all the time, so he had some relatives and some friends that had came to Alexandria, but he came when he was 15 and got a job, get several jobs. But then they would always let him go because they'd find out how old he was. So he'd have to come back down there and work at a saw mill or something. And finally, when he got to be 18, he came back and he stayed here ever since. And then we got married and I came here. So that's how we got here.

MEETING HUSBAND & TRANSITION TO ALEXANDRIA

Francesco De Salvatore [00:15:31] Can you tell us, how did you meet your husband and what's his name?

Rosa Byrd [00:15:36] His name's Jack. Well, there's the truth, and then there's the lie he tells. We moved into the county where he lived. And every morning, on my way to school, I would see them

coming by, going to their jobs. And I was friendly. I'd wave. And then he says he picked me up on the side of the road, and that's how I met him. But they were friendly people in a rural area like that. They stopped by our house and introduced themselves. And that's how we met. Yep.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:16:12] What were some of your first dates, or...?

Rosa Byrd [00:16:15] Well, the first time he asked me to go out, I told him he had to go ask my dad if he could take me out. And he did it, he got his nerve up. They were down in the garden and he walked down and asked, could he take me to the movie? And then he came back here. I was in high school. I was in the 12th grade, 11th and 12th grade. And we dated long distance. He'd always come home down there until we got married.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:16:49] How old were you when you moved to Alexandria?

Rosa Byrd [00:16:53] I was 18.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:16:54] 18. So what year was it?

Rosa Byrd [00:16:56] Mm. I graduated in '61. So that's when I came, the same year I graduated.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS OF ALEXANDRIA

Francesco De Salvatore [00:17:04] Tell us, what were your first impressions of the city of Alexandria?

Rosa Byrd [00:17:09] Well, coming up, I had been to Baltimore a couple of times. I had seen how when city people came to the country they live, you get an image of what they live like. It wasn't how we lived. And then when I came here, it was okay. And again I came. He has a big family too. A lady had a rooming house that was our first home when we first came here, then our second home, we went into D.C. to get an apartment because we tried to get an apartment on Powhatan Street here in Alexandria. The lady told us to come over and we could get there, but when we got there, she realized we were Black. And she said, "Oh, I never, um, I never went to talk to anybody." But she talked to him on the phone. But we went to D.C. over on Wheeler Road, southeast Washington, and we stayed there for a few years until both of our children were born. And then over the years, he always wanted to come back to Alexandria. So before the oldest one started kindergarten, we moved back to Bellefonte Avenue here in Alexandria, and then things were fine and then we moved here in '68. That's when we came to this house.

THE BYRD HOUSE & NEIGHBORHOOD: LOCATION & HISTORY

Francesco De Salvatore [00:18:47] So for those who don't know, where is this house right now?

Rosa Byrd [00:18:53] What area of the city? It's in Lynnhaven area of the city.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:18:58] And so it is that what people called it in '68?

Rosa Byrd [00:19:02] Well, our subdivision is called Lynnhaven. Yes. And when we came here, it was predominately white. And as I think I spoke to you before about red lining, we really came from a totally rural area. He was lucky to work with an older gentleman that told Jack, "Time you buy a house." Jack was working to two jobs and he said, "You know, you a good man, you're trying, but you need to buy a home." So he told us to buy a home. So we just got a real estate agent. And they took us around and we looked at several homes. But now that you're old, wiser, he only took us on two streets in this neighborhood looking at homes, because at that time there were evidence of redlining, that white people were moving out. We weren't the very first Black family to move here, but we were close to the first. And I found out that one Halloween. It was the first Halloween I was here. It was a family walk and the people were friendly. He was walking with me and my oldest daughter. And he was talking about how he was moving. But I was so shocked cause I just got here and was pleased to be here. And he told me that his neighbor, he and the neighbor had a covenant, that they would not sell their house to Black people. And he said, "To hell with their Covenant." He was getting the hell out of here. Now, you know, hearing that, you know, finally realized he was getting away from us, you know, from Black people. But that didn't bother me so much because I was still naive and I was so happy to be getting home and, you know, going on with our lives. My husband had a job and I had a job when we moved here. So I saw one of your questions was about the who lived next door to us. And when we moved here, it was a couple named Florence and Fred Medford. And from the first day we came here, they were really friendly to us.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:21:28] Were they a white family, or...?

Rosa Byrd [00:21:28] A white family; they were really nice to us. They had one daughter, but she was away living in New York somewhere. But they were older anyway. We moved here in 1st of December, Christmas Day, we woke up and on our porch she had bought gifts for our two children and wrapped it in the comic paper. And then from that time on, we were really close because they were getting old and frail. She was the strongest one, when you looked at her, but unfortunately, she was the first one that passed away. And that left the husband next door. But we took care of them. We both went to work. Sometimes I'd come home from work because he was frail and give him his soup for lunch; he ate really simply. And then I go back to work and he would eat something at home in the evening. And it went on like that until he got really sick. And I met the daughter. But then I had to call and tell her and she put him in a nursing home in Arlington and they sold the house. They sold the house to someone else.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:22:48] Yeah. Well, what about the other neighbors in the area? What are your memories of the other neighbors when you first moved?

Rosa Byrd [00:22:54] The other the neighbors on this side, that was a young couple. And again, they were white. In here, we were not the first, but we are almost the oldest in this block. But they bought us fruit from next door. And I remember she worked something in the government, so she took my daughter and I to embassies in D.C. That was exciting for us because we didn't know about such things as that. She stayed there and then she and her husband got a divorce. But we didn't have

problems originally with the neighbors. It was when we moved here, we were impressed because the sweeper went up and down the streets, cleaning the street. Well, they gave me notice, they're not coming anymore. And Ms. Tucker, I tell you, she was my angel until this day. She turned out to be my best friend and tutor for me. She taught me lots of things. Well then, we called City Hall, you know, supposedly we are the ones that, you know, have so much trash. And we're doing this. Looks like you'd start cleaning the streets twice a week instead of stopping it. But they—the city of Alexandria—they brought it back. And that's when we start getting together, to things where we was here. We were happy. We were good, living here. When you asked how we liked living here, we were instrumental in getting a playground in this neighborhood. The park right down the street here, we worked to get that. The biggest problem we had was Cora Kelly School. I realized that, and at first, everything was okay. But then slowly, as the white families moved away, things were going down at our school and I went to school because of flooding in this area. It was a floodplain where the school is. I went down to PTA meeting. It was flood, it was mud everywhere. But then some of the people on the committee was meeting with Mt. Vernon School at night for something. These floors was were shiny and everything. So then I came back and asked our principal and as it turned out to be, they had a night crew to come in and clean their school. But all our custodians were day and they couldn't really keep up with the kids in school. And that was their problem. Again, we complained to the school board people and then we got a night crew here at this school. The rec center was on the ground at first and they built it on stilts so the kids could come in and every time it flooded, it didn't get completely washed away. And we had all kind of programs here. It didn't matter that the neighborhood was shifting because people, I mean, people got along. "Did you feel threatened by your neighbors?" I never felt any of that. But it was good because some of this migration from Halifax County, where we were from, a lot of people: "Oh, Rose and Jack got a house over on Wesmond," well, the houses were up for sale. They were sometimes in better financial condition than we were because they were older. But a lot of my neighbors from there still live on the street. And we have relatives on other streets because this is where we came.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:26:56] And so many of them came from Halifax.

Rosa Byrd [00:26:59] Halifax? Yeah, the ones that we knew.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:27:01] The ones you knew. How many, would you say?

Rosa Byrd [00:27:05] Well, it's five of us. All five of my family lives here, and my husband has two... um, the lady, we had a room and we lived with, when we first came in the rooming house, she's here. My husband has two sisters that's here with their husband and lots of friends, so it was quite a few of us that lived here, but came from the same place.

COMMUNITY WORK IN ALEXANDRIA: SCHOOL SYSTEM

Francesco De Salvatore [00:27:33] Yeah. I want to revisit, like, all the amazing effort you put into the community to create change. But I just want to quickly, though, for those who haven't seen your house, like, can you describe your house for for those who can't see it?

Rosa Byrd [00:27:54] For us, it was a typical rowhouse. It has two bedrooms upstairs, a living room, and the dining room is very small. And our basement, when we moved here, was unfinished. That's what we had. The codes in the city, the code enforcement, it was really strict. My friend Ruby Tucker was a foster mother, and she's the one that, you know, we could only have X number of people in these small houses. And so for us it was okay because we only had the boy and a girl. And as they grew, one went in the basement and one had the bedroom upstairs. People were happy here, I mean. One thing I can say about my family, my husband was moving up in Metro, so he got a higher paying job and he was superintendent at one place. And all of the people on his shift, the guys that work for him, would be leaving here, whatever, and we'd go to their homes over in Maryland, PG County, big, beautiful homes, pools in the backyard. And he wanted to move there but my kids were in school, I like being in the PTA, blah, blah, blah. I never wanted to move as they grew up. And one of the things you talked about was, were the children happy? You know, growing up here in this city? How was it? It was great. All the kids initially went to Cora Kelly School, but then desegregation came along and they started rating our schools. Your school got a number, you know, all the good things that you had. Well, Cora Kelly came up really high. And when time came to close the school, because our school flooded sometime during that deliberation of what school they would get rid of, they chose Cora Kelly School to close. And, you know, that was just a bald-faced lie to us. We knew they were saying they were closing it because of the flooding. But if we had all these high marks for the structure and the way the school was built and the people that attended, the enrollment—we had all high marks, but then we had to take the defeat that it did flood and it just flooded by the time the deliberation was going on. But the school board promised that when the flood was over, they would reopen the school. So we never let them forget, election or no election. We did not allow them to forget. We're waiting for you to reopen our school. And I can't tell you how many years it was. I have a book here that a lady wrote. She was a white parent that wrote about our school on celebrating 50 years of excellence. We had a wonderful PTA, all these really good feelings with the people in the community, in parents. And then they reopen this school as a magnet school. You had to apply to go to school because it was a math, science and technology school. A STEM school, one of the first ones that I had heard of in my lifetime. Then that's when the Great Migration, what it was through. What do you call it, regentrification? It became more and more Black schools. It went on for several years. Don't ask me how many. Then all of a sudden, Alexandria had white schools on the West End and Black schools on this end. They came up with a program called "kindergarten two to two." So the kindergarten and first and second grade from this end of town—first, second and third, I think—would stay here. And then the four or five and six were transferred over to John Adams; they paired a white school and the Black school. And I remember Ms. Tucker again, I keep saying her name. They were getting ready to vote and she looked at the the schools. All white kindergarten children were staying in their neighborhood. And all the Black kids had to go be bused to the other. She said, "No, we're not having that," and she had enough influence and she was respected enough. They flip-flop it. So Cora Kelly became a K, 1, 2, 3 and John Adams became a 4, 5, 6 cause those kids were bused this way. That was one of the things that, getting at school reopened, I was proud of. And this was just everyday political living. You go to the people, you go to the meetings, you get the people to vote, you get everybody involved. And that was fine. With the schools, with Cora Kelly School when we got it open, that was nice. The other fight, and I—

Francesco De Salvatore [00:33:27] And when did it reopen?

Rosa Byrd [00:33:29] It tells you in here. I can't remember, that's why I hand it out. But it's somewhere in there.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:33:35] Yeah.

Rosa Byrd [00:33:36] It tells you what year and, oh, to the right. Is the date on there? Somewhere... We'll turn this page over and look for it.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:33:50] Yeah, well.

Rosa Byrd [00:33:52] I can keep it. I had got it out. The other thing that I like to say we fought for that didn't have anything to do with crime and that was when Jack Kent Cooke wanted to build a stadium across the street at Potomac Yards. And Doug Wilder came up from Richmond, and there were a lot of people wanting to do that. But this particular neighborhood and a lot of the city people didn't want it here. There were other things we could do with that property. Well, when I was getting together the pictures for the library, but I have a picture of us the day we won that. And he didn't get the chance to build across there.

INSPIRATION FOR COMMUNITY ACTIVISM IN SCHOOL SYSTEM

Francesco De Salvatore [00:34:40] So it sounds like the first kind of community organizing you did was around the schools. And so what led you to—like, I mean, obviously your kids went there, but—why? Like, why get involved? What inspired you to get involved?

Rosa Byrd [00:35:02] Because I wanted my children to have the same thing at our schools that other schools had. And Alexandria, I think, have been good to their schools. Again, when our school was an all-Black school, the principal lived down the street. We were fine. But then when they came in, some place when they decided or had to desegregate is when, you know, you had to be more watchful of what you had, so your school would not wind up getting the lesser. Whatever that school got, we were going to make sure that our children got.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:35:44] So, when did this happen?

Rosa Byrd [00:35:51] I'm not good with years. Uh...

Francesco De Salvatore [00:35:52] It was probably the early seventies, right?

Rosa Byrd [00:35:56] Yeah, but my daughter, she went to the 4, 5, 6. You know, they went to John Adams school. I can't tell you dates because I didn't look, I just wrote it from my head.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:36:08] It was the seventies.

Rosa Byrd [00:36:14] And our neighborhood was fine. We got awards, some people for beautiful yards. And, you know, in that part we were called the Snoop Sisters because we walked up and down the alleys to see that the trash truck didn't pick up the trash properly. We called Dominion—well, whatever the electric company was back then—when our street lights were out and then when the—

Francesco De Salvatore [00:36:43] Really quick, before we get there. So, for the schools. How did you organize that? Was it through a PTA?

Rosa Byrd [00:36:52] Yeah. Oh, it was. It was a PTA. You know, not just this neighborhood, but all the neighborhoods that way, and—

Francesco De Salvatore [00:37:01] Who was on the PTA?

Rosa Byrd [00:37:03] Oh, from our neighborhood?

Francesco De Salvatore [00:37:05] Yeah. So you...?

Rosa Byrd [00:37:06] I was on there, Ms. Tucker was on there. Ms. Bailey was on there. The same as in our civic association. We became officers in the civic association. When we first came here, it was white people and Ms. Tucker was the only Black person on there. But when it was time to get new officers, my brother used to be president of the PTA. My sister and I used to be a secretary at the school. So you just did what you had to do to keep the neighborhood. And Halloween—you might be too young—but at one time, we remember, it got dangerous for people to get candies for children. So every Halloween, we would ask each family, each house, to give us \$5, and we would have a haunted house at Cora Kelly School. And that went on, until it got so big that we were getting children from down the highway coming up here. And then, you know, the parents would be bringing them in and it was too much. It was okay when it was the neighborhood, two neighborhoods here, and that was the Hume Springs neighborhood. We united because our kids went to school together and we did it every year. And it was so wonderful. My friend, she would make all the costumes, and my husband would go down and cook hot dogs and it was a family-oriented community. Mhm. Mhm. And then—

Francesco De Salvatore [00:38:36] That's great. So you were organizing with the PTA?

Rosa Byrd [00:38:40] The Civic Association.

COMMUNITY WORK IN ALEXANDRIA: CIVIC ASSOCIATION

Francesco De Salvatore [00:38:41] Right. So tell me a little about the Civic Association. For those who don't know, like what is a civic association?

Rosa Byrd [00:38:48] This civic association, we're not a home owners association. These are just separate houses. But we made sure that there were ordinances in the city about how high your grass could get, what containers for trash you had to have in your backyard, the number of people that could be in a home. All sorts of, those kind of code enforcement things. And then as the

neighborhood changed, we had Vola Lawson and Del Pepper were two people that really worked with us. We had a good relationship with them. We could call them and share what our problems were. They came out to our meetings and would listen to the things that were going on in the neighborhood. And even to this day, Del Pepper, I just saw her last Saturday. And then Vola passed away. This land has Section Eight housing people started coming in and they really didn't give a hoot about what went on in the houses and how many people were in the houses and all that. So we could go back and the city was really responsive, listening to us. I mean, some people can complain, but there was a that group of us that, by that time, a lot of the white people had left. Either that, or they were still here. Everybody didn't move out, but they stayed here. But they would even, you know, help us. We had yard cleanups, you know, just like regular neighborhoods. We don't even do that now. And we could still use it some time. But it's just a different, you know, brand of people. Not as civic-minded as we are. Just last month, we voted to change our neighborhood association from Lynnhaven Civic Association because of the racial connotation on the word civic, you know, it goes back. So now it's the Neighbors Citizens Association. That's going to be our new name. But things went well for us. I do remember I went to a meeting one night and there were some white people there afraid, because when they went by the park, there was all these young, they were saying, young hoodlums in the park and whatever. And I said, "My God, where are they?" And when they went, when the time the kids were there, the boys were there. I said, "My God, that's my son and his friends." They didn't know. They just knew it was a group and they were growing up then, tall boys, but I know they were good kids, but it was the fact that they didn't know, so we had to get that straight. Who were the outsiders in this neighborhood and who were the people that actually lived here.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:42:21] How'd it feel as a mother when that happened?

Rosa Byrd [00:42:24] I thought they were crazy because, now, these are, you know, our kids. So the neighborhood was fine. And even I didn't realize there were people in our parks and standing on the corner. But I didn't pay any attention to it, maybe because I was Black and they were Black, so. But then we realized that what was happening, drugs were coming into the neighborhood. We called Vola Lawson and we met with... I know Police Chief Samarra was one of the ones we met with. So this neighborhood was the first neighborhood that got a policeman, a neighborhood policeman, assigned. They got up in the morning and came to work here and they went home. They worked here. They walked through the neighborhood. They went house to house. They get to know the people. The people got to know them. We weren't afraid to call them and tell them about "we saw drug activity" or whatever. And Robin Nichols is still at the police department. And there's some people that moved away, but they were really helpful in that, too. So it just took people sitting down talking to each other. I remember one day, you know, working on your cars on the street and then the oil would run down, I saw a guy out there doing that. I called the policeman and I was upstairs. And when the policeman came, the man talked about, it was a white person. Then I said he was working on his car. And the policeman said, I remember, "Listen, I don't care what you do over here, I have to do my job." So then I called, right as soon as he did that, and reported him to our neighborhood policeman, who in turn sent the assistant chief over to talk to us. And we talked about that kind of attitude at our meetings because neighborhoods, I don't think, become ghettos by themselves. People look the other way, citizens look the other way. City Council looked the other way. There was one person in the city—I won't call his name because you might know him—he was well known. There would be gambling on

the streets. And I called. And then, when he came, he was all, "it's dark, y'all need street lighting. You can't see what they're doing." And I said "That's got to be a lie because they have to count the dots on the dice. So you gonna tell me you can't see them, you know, down on the ground shooting dice?" They didn't really get to be big fights, but you had to stand up for yourself because given the lame excuses that, you know, "you can't see, it's dark." And when we were going to get new street lighting because we didn't have it, we went to look at them and one of the police officers told us, "Don't let them put them high bright lights in your neighborhood." He says, "Officer, if I go in any city, the neighborhoods with those big glaring lights are the neighborhoods that have problems." So then this little group, the Snoop Sisters, rode over to where Vola Lawson lived and see what kind of street lights she had, we went to the projects to tell what kind of lights they had. And then just rolled around to see the sections of the city. It's parts of the city that had the big bright lights were neighborhoods that were having all kinds of drug problems or whatever. So when we came back, we got together for the meeting. We did not get big bright lights here. We want lights just like the regular people, not conceding because you're helping us look for the criminal, but you're taking something away from our neighborhood: that we're not like every other neighborhood. And that worked out for us, too. And then, during that time, we would have the Drug Marches on Crime Night out. I have a picture somewhere. Jim Moran would be one of the people leading our march as mayor. Kerry Donley would go, you know, neighborhood to neighborhood and march through and let people know. Then we stopped calling it a drug march, and it was just the neighborhood march, holiday march, because the good people outnumbered the bad people. One article in the newspaper wrote about drug activity, that nurses couldn't come here because it was so bad. At that I was offended because the people in the street don't didn't own a thing here. These were our homes, this was our streets. But they came from other places and stood on the street and sold drugs and whatever. But I'm proud and I will say it, you know, for I don't know how many times we survived that. We didn't ever go out like some neighborhood march, you know, with lights. We didn't do that. We did them at meetings with the police department, and they participated too, so pretty soon we got most of the drug people, the Section Eight people. We didn't go over there and testify. We met with one of the head people, Vola, our person here, and several members of the neighborhood just shared with them what was going on. And every house that would come up, they would get it. Those kinds of people would get it. Then they just at that point, no more. Yeah, I'm pretty sure that wasn't legal, that they could not put in more Section Eight houses in this area. And they did that also.

CHANGES BROUGHT ABOUT BY COMMUNITY ACTIVISM

Francesco De Salvatore [00:48:50] Well, yeah. I mean, so, like, when did you start to see these changes in the neighborhood?

Rosa Byrd [00:48:56] With the people? But at the same time, these ladies were talking about the children in the park. I mean, I just didn't see it. It didn't dawn on me because our sons would go down and play in, at that time, it was a paved I mean, they had a basketball hoop in there. They would go and play. But, then you get up in the morning, you see people standing on the corner, you go to bed at night, these people are standing on the corner. Then they would sometimes be noisy at night. Sometimes, but you would also see, you know, they would be going up and down whistling all those things that, you know, are not right. But, when they were down that way we had people who would

call saying, "Rose, they are coming up your way now" and then when we called the police, I remember one time in particular, I had called the police because some people wouldn't call the police. They'd call you to call the police.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:49:56] Mm. How come?

Rosa Byrd [00:49:58] Well, cause they were afraid to call and I wasn't afraid as long as I was in my house. I am not going out in the street and be stupid and be confrontational. And that was the way several of us were. But, when we did call in, the lady I think two doors down from me, they couldn't find it. And my phone rang again. She said, "Tell them to look under the trash can." So, I called back to the station or wherever, and they looked under the trash can and they found it. And the police, you know, they come out here, they'd be pizza truck drivers. They'd be all kinds of different tactics they used to get.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:50:40] Like, how would you describe your years and the civic association relationship with the police during this period?

Rosa Byrd [00:50:46] Very good. Very good. I, then later well, it had to be, you know, conversation and with the higher ups, not just the regular policeman that is on the beat because I think if it was just the policeman on the beat, some didn't give a hoot. Some of them were just trying to go home and get back safely, which I don't blame them, but, we always had the City Council people. Rose Boyd, I think she's still working for this city. She was the citizen's assistant office. She was wonderful working with us. So those type of things, it wasn't a large group of us. Some of our neighbors got mad with us, and that's how we got that name, because we would, if things were not right, weren't cleaned properly or the trash truck didn't come when it was supposed to come, we would report it. And I love it because people react.

THE SNOOP SISTERS

Francesco De Salvatore [00:51:53] Yeah. So you mentioned the name. You're talking about the Snoop Sisters. Can you talk more about it? Like who? Who were the Snoop Sisters?

Rosa Byrd [00:52:03] Well, Ms. Step has gone on to heaven. Then the other lady, there was five of us. And I don't want to say their names. I don't mind my name, but Miss Bailey still lives down the street. And me. And it was, we would, you know again, you'd walk to alleyways who didn't have trash cans, whose trash cans were running over and we could pass them on to Rose Boyd's office or the Sanitation Department or whatever. And part of it was the workers too. The workers had a different attitude when they went, you know, to this neighborhood. And we all had children. Every one of us. One of the ladies that helped, she still lives on the West End now. She doesn't live here. But we did. Like we said, the parties we did, the cheerleading squads and the rec center down there had senior programs and then we had 4HB upholstered chairs due to 4H back in that time. It was a normal neighborhood. And I'm so glad that when trouble raised its ugly, reared its ugly head, we didn't get rid of it right away. But with the right combination of people speaking out, like now with all this stuff that is going on. It didn't mean it had stopped. The kids with the heavy drugs were gone and most

people had moved away. But, one family was still here smoking marijuana when it wasn't legal. But, I wouldn't call because that was when policemen were killing people. Now, I don't want it near me. Whatever. But, I don't want to call the policeman on the child and the policeman's head jump time and he kills somebody's child or the policeman gets hurt. So, at that point, I'd stop. I would not call police.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:54:06] What was that point when...?

Rosa Byrd [00:54:08] He was maybe, I mean, the young boy that I particularly liked lived two doors from us. And I guess he's been dead, I'd say maybe ten years ago. But, we haven't had problems in con times.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:54:23] Yeah. Yeah. I'm curious. Just, you know, because there were, you know, um. I mean, you moved to Alexandria.

Rosa Byrd [00:54:32] Sixty-eight.

COMMUNITY RELATIONS WITH THE POLICE

Francesco De Salvatore [00:54:34] Right. So, yeah. Right. And so you were around for the, um, you know, during the sixties and seventies when there were tensions between the police and black residents. I'm curious, like in the eighties as you're doing this organizing, like what was the neighborhoods, I mean, it sounds like you were favorable to having a relationship with the police.

Rosa Byrd [00:55:02] Oh, but some people weren't. We had, I was thinking we had, um, you know, confrontations with people and, I don't want to say some parents had to know, but, when Tracy Fields, I don't know if you ever heard of him. He was a person that did drugs here in the neighborhood. He didn't live in our neighborhood. He lived down. But.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:55:27] Tell us about. Yeah. Tracy Fields.

Rosa Byrd [00:55:30] He lives down in another neighborhood. But, I don't think how you know, if you could be home living in a house with your parents, you know, how they not know? Where do you get money from? If you have a car, you go eat everyday, all this kind of stuff. How do you do all that stuff? Or come up with clothes when I know I didn't give them to you? I'm not buying them. So, how did the parents who look the other way? And it was, I wasn't always, this group of people, I'm telling you the two policemen were not always right. That battle I had, because when I said that people were gambling on the streets, but if you come ride through in the car and don't get out of your car and then you go back, you don't see anybody. Well, I look out there an hour later and the same people are there. And when we do talk, you talk about "it's too dark" for you to see. Well that's a lie. And I don't mind telling you that it's a lie. If they can see how to count and know who won the money in the dice game, you can see these big bodies and things on the ground. And no, I can't tell you that everybody was pro call the police or do whatever. Some people preferred to look the other way. But, it didn't take that many of us. Because we went to the police academies to learn what it meant when they called

the police. And I even did that, a shooting or they let you pretend to shoot people. I always killed the people when I shouldn't have because I was in the third police academy class. Ms. Tucker was in the first.

POLICE ACADEMY WORK

Francesco De Salvatore [00:57:17] Why did you go to the police academy?

Rosa Byrd [00:57:19] Because. Because you can learn the things, what the police should do.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:57:23] And so, like the Civic Association was asked to go?

Rosa Byrd [00:57:26] Yes, but it was a city-wide program. It's the city-wide program, that's why I didn't get into the first two because they can only take so many. Like the city at this time, the sheriff's department has an academy so I could go there and find out what the sheriff's department does. I went to the Commonwealth Attorneys Citizens Academy that I think Alexandria has. I don't know how many Citizens Academies they have. The fire department, all these people. We can go and have an understanding of what they can do and what they can't do and all that. The police department was the first one. I had a beautiful picture in the paper that I did. I had to get that out and take it to the library. It was so much to learn when they were right, when they were wrong, and when citizens were wrong, too. And, they are still doing it because one, the sheriff's department, I know one of our neighbors just went. They just finished up their class with the sheriff's department of, you learn what they do at the jail. I was proud of the jail because in Southern Virginia, where we come from, the families have to pay X amount of dollars for the prisoner to eat. They don't have to do that here. There, there's no money to do that. But here you don't have to do it. And people have jobs and they could pay for their children if they get in trouble. So it's things like that when, you know, things are so one sided. I mean, it is stupid asking people that barely can eat to pay for food at the jail.

LANDLORD ISSUES & SECTION EIGHT HOUSING

Francesco De Salvatore [00:59:19] And you talked to me about, um, before we did the recording about certain landlords in the area, Um, do you want to talk about, like.

Rosa Byrd [00:59:32] What they did or?

Francesco De Salvatore [00:59:33] Yeah. Yes

Rosa Byrd [00:59:34] Well, okay. One of the things we learned when we went to open, when we went to learn about Section Eight housing.

Francesco De Salvatore [00:59:42] Yeah.

Rosa Byrd [00:59:43] First of all, uh, you, the people, I didn't know how they work because I'm, you know, country girl. You don't know that. But, if there's a fee on the house that, you rent a house for

X number of dollars a month, the government would give the landlord the large portion of the rent. Then, the tenants have to pay a smaller amount according to their income. Well, the landlords would put people there and they didn't care if the house was run down, the house and the people in it. And there was supposed to be people in the city checking on them. I don't know what happened, but they would have people there that, you know, there are too many people in the house. But, I need to just pause right now, it is totally different now with the Hispanic and the other immigrants coming in and they live in houses together because they can't, you know, they can't get a house because the rent is so high. We understand that they couldn't. And to us back then, it was that way. Several houses around here became rooming houses.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:00:57] Mhm.

Rosa Byrd [01:00:58] And is that yours? He'll get it. That was my husband. He'll get that. When you talk about that like, see you're not going to go too far now, all of a sudden whether you believe as little as my house is and that I'll tell you is extra we put on. These houses have been rented out as Airbnbs.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:01:22] Mhm.

Rosa Byrd [01:01:22] Really expensive.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:01:24] Yeah.

Rosa Byrd [01:01:25] The people.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:01:25] But, you were talking about a landlord during that period, of that period, who was abusing. Right?

Rosa Byrd [01:01:33] Yeah. Well, they did, you know, they talked to us too. The guy next door would talk to me. The people got in. He, his house was fine when he put him in there. Sometimes, they broke things, they fixed things. They didn't pay their rent and then. But, I found out later every time he evicted a family, the federal government paid him money to put his house back in the pristine condition it was when the people went in. Well, sometimes they didn't. They get the money from the city, but, they didn't do all of the stuff that they were supposed to fix up in their homes. So, I didn't go in many Section Eight houses, but some people, I knew them and I went in and that was, again, to me, they were predators because they knew, you know, they knew sometimes when people, they lost their jobs, they did this or they had children in the houses. We were proud of our home. So, we were taking care of them, putting in the garden, grass and taking care of them. And these people, they didn't, when they first put people in public housing out in Cameron Valley, I was at a meeting one night and realized those people had to go to classes. The people they were putting in those houses, before they could move in that neighborhood with the public housing that was new, white people, had to go to classes to learn. Put your trash out. Do this. These were people that didn't know. So, but the same people that would get in a Section Eight house over here, didn't have to go to class. They just came, got their rent, whatever, and they got to just live in the house. So that's, these are just the

things that I think make a neighborhood or a troubled neighborhood or neighborhood that goes down to ruin. It's because of the lack of knowledge and the lack of enforcement.

OTHER COMMUNITY EFFORTS & ACTIVISM

Francesco De Salvatore [01:03:42] Yeah. Are there any other community efforts that you were a part of, a community organizing, you were part of that you haven't mentioned so far?

Rosa Byrd [01:03:48] Oh, wait a minute. I got to grab a paper. Let's see. Um.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:03:57] I want to ask you about the MLK event and all that, but is there anything.

Rosa Byrd [01:04:01] Well, no. Um. We talked about the school and we talked about my neighbors. I was trying to go by your questions. Just one. We did that. We had, and again, just to say what type of normal the businesses around here, sponsored football teams, basketball teams, just like, you know, in all of the other neighborhoods. So there wasn't a big problem with that. Um. I wanted to, there might have been something else. I want to make sure. Talked about the schools once. Something I wrote one of these sheets because I forgot. Oh, that one of the businesses here we talked about, Miss Tucker, she has a scholarship in her name. It's still at T.C. Williams because of the activity that she did here. I have one. There was a a business up on the corner of Reed and J.D. Highway. When that company got ready to sell, they put a scholarship in my name at T.C. Williams and it's the Lynn Haven Rosa Byrd Scholarship. And they, because they were impressed with how we worked and fought for the neighborhood. And it didn't seem as though, when you're going through something and it didn't seem like it was, you know, that bad or whatever, because you really had to go to the Civic Association. But even now, I think as far as, and I'm going to go back to Airbnbs, even though Lord knows I haven't had problems with people. But, I'm sure when people go rent in a neighborhood with, you know, down in Old Town with the apartments, with the hotels and things, there's certain rules and things that go for them that we don't have it out here, but they're getting the same type of service out here. You know, the parking, the this, the trash pickup and all that. I think I've been learning about Airbnbs because I've stayed in a couple myself. They are really nice. But again, how there's a little neighborhood like this, how much, you know, how much weight of those type things can be whole before the neighborhood tips the other way. And I don't, if I've forgotten something to talk to you about. Oh, the one thing I wanted to tell you, the seven, I think you asked me once about businesses. The church right down on the corner. I'm not sure if you were aware, that was a 7-Eleven. You know about that? That was.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:07:00] Yeah. Could you tell us, though? I'm aware of it. But just so for people listening.

Rosa Byrd [01:07:05] Well. Well, I mean, I just know a little bit. I don't know as much as some people, but the story was that the young clerk in the store lied and said that the boy had a gun or a knife or something. And that's when the night when they, I had babies then, so I wasn't really involved in the civic association. Miss Tucker was. They call people like her and preachers to come out that night to

try to quell the, it would have been like a riot, I guess, like they have now. But, those people went and they took the children, I believe, to Mt. Vernon School or some church in the area. And they talked all night, but they still threw bottles and they burned the 7-Eleven. And then the 7-Eleven was never rebuilt as a 7-Eleven. It was built as a church. And still, the church, some of my relatives are in the church now. But, the fact that, you know, it just went crazy. And, you know, again, I was home. It really got, I like the fact that, again, this is the people that lived in the communities, got together and squelched the problem. Not completely. And I don't know how many nights they went out, but I don't think it was many that they did. Oh yeah, that was the one thing that I had written down to tell you about.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:08:40] Mm hmm.

Rosa Byrd [01:08:40] But, I mean, you know most of it. But, it didn't affect us, you know, there was marching from in town and.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:08:49] Yeah, well, what were your memories of those protests?

Rosa Byrd [01:08:54] Not very much from me.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:08:55] Yeah.

Rosa Byrd [01:08:55] You know, I told you I wasn't there at that time. I wasn't. I had small kids, so I didn't go out in the street that night. I heard people talking about it the next day. I don't know half what was true and half what wasn't true. But, I did like the fact that, in the end, it was proven that the child did not have a knife or whatever he was supposed to have. And he might have been shoplifting like the person said. I'm not being judgmental on each side, but that's the only problem that I know. And that, again, we only have five streets. So if you go right over there, that's not us.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:09:33] Yeah.

Rosa Byrd [01:09:34] It was right there. And then, one of our apartments down here that's within our boundaries, they turned that into, what is it now? It wasn't Section eight housing. Yes, it was. They changed it from an apartment. That apartment building was for low income housing. And we never had problems with that either. Except for, you know, the trash, the this and that. And the Sanitation Department doing their job as they should, can take care of a debt. But, when they don't, we would have that. But, during that drug time, a child, this had nothing to do with drugs, this young boy with the gun shot somebody you know, in a car.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:10:26] Mm hmm.

Rosa Byrd [01:10:29] That sounds like police now.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:10:30] Mm hmm.

Rosa Byrd [01:10:33] Oh, that is a Rescue Squad.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:10:35] Mm hmm.

Rosa Byrd [01:10:37] Yeah, but if you ask me, living here, I've always liked living here. I haven't been afraid of living here. I reckon that's the changes. I've learned, you know, everything that they say about black neighborhoods is not true because I loved my neighborhood when it was all black. We had some people with problems and whatever, but, like now I don't know my neighbor's name. And then they stay here five years mostly or three, because they were there for whatever reason. We have people been here since we've been here.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:11:19] Yeah.

Rosa Byrd [01:11:20] And then, you know, you know the people, you know the families, you know whatever. But, every, I don't, yeah, I do know in this neighborhood two houses or three that have been rented to black people, because that is not happening anymore. But, other than that, my kids loved the school.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:11:46] Hmm.

Rosa Byrd [01:11:46] And all of my children went to Alexandria City Public School and my grandchildren, except that one that went to Episcopal. And he liked Episcopal. I liked Episcopal. When he was going there for different things, we went. But, you could always tell that it was, I'm not going to use the word, you know, they would click, you know, certain people, certain class of people were in there mainly. And they were very nice. Always. Never, we never had any problems with them.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:12:23] Hmm.

Rosa Byrd [01:12:24] But, most men like my husband, he worked two jobs. I told you. Before we moved here and even after we moved here.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:12:32] Mm hmm.

Rosa Byrd [01:12:33] So we could, you know, do things to the house, fix it up, and just keep living. There's so many people that, you know, came here. I mean, most of them stayed until, how to me it is ending is older people like me who pass away and we have one house, two children or three children, and when it is time to divvy up, everybody wants their money and then they just go out, you know, that way.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:13:05] Mm hmm.

Rosa Byrd [01:13:05] But, yeah, I loved it. If you asked me, I loved living in Alexandria. I don't want to go anywhere. I love the senior programs that teach us things to do. Like, it's like, almost getting scammed. They teach us, uh, you know, about strokes. I learned about strokes. I've had three. But

because of the class, I had over at Charles Houston [Rec Center], I knew what was happening to me. It wasn't something that I was totally unaware of.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:13:37] Mm hmm.

Rosa Byrd [01:13:38] So, I don't know what else.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:13:40] Mm hmm.

Rosa Byrd [01:13:40] That we could talk about, but.....

BYRD NEIGHBORHOOD IN THE SEVENTIES & EIGHTIES

Francesco De Salvatore [01:13:41] Yeah, one thing I didn't ask you in the beginning, but I want to ask you right now. So, can you describe what the neighborhood, can you describe what it was like in the seventies and eighties in terms of like, what were the businesses? Like what, where were the places children played? Like.....

Rosa Byrd [01:14:02] Okay,.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:14:02] Could you give us like a rundown? Just.

Rosa Byrd [01:14:04] Okay.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:14:04] Obviously, it's much different now.

Rosa Byrd [01:14:06] Well no, not that very much different. Now, when you say Lin Haven, Lin Haven only has five streets.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:14:14] Right. Yeah. So yeah, if you could like.

Rosa Byrd [01:14:16] Yeah. Okay.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:14:17] Describe the, like, what was it like.

Rosa Byrd [01:14:20] East Glebe Road is that way.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:14:22] Yeah.

Rosa Byrd [01:14:23] You come up Reed Avenue. No, Commonwealth Avenue goes up to the school and Reed Avenue goes up to JD Highway.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:14:34] Mm hmmm

Rosa Byrd [01:14:35] And then JD highway, which was Jefferson Davis at that time.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:14:38] Yeah.

Rosa Byrd [01:14:39] So, within those five streets we had a grocery store, a corner store on the corner, we had Marino's Sandwich Shop, which is still there. Then, everything else was outside of quote unquote Lin Haven. We had two grocery stores. I wrote them down. There was, then we had a drug store. We had RGA and Safeway. We had a drug fair. What was that, drug fair or whatever there? Then, we installed those two parks that I talked to you about. That was the open space that we had. The rest.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:15:18] What were the parks called?

Rosa Byrd [01:15:20] It is Lynnhaven Playground. And then Lynnhaven Gateway.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:15:23] Mm hmm.

Rosa Byrd [01:15:24] And now, we are going to redo the Lynnhaven Gateway. I'm not so much into that anymore. But, we have pictures with Mayor Beasley.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:15:35] Mm hmm.

Rosa Byrd [01:15:35] We are digging the first ground when we did that, and we had lights in the playground. But, we took the lights away because boys would play basketball too late at night. So, it was almost like that pickle thing going on in Arlington. So really this, and people cared about each other. Um, we, we had, I mean. I don't know. I just, I liked it here. And a lot of people own their homes. A lot of people rented but, they rented a long time.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:16:11] Mm hmmm.

Rosa Byrd [01:16:12] Until the rents and things went so high.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:16:14] Yeah.

Rosa Byrd [01:16:15] That.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:16:17] Yeah.

Rosa Byrd [01:16:20] But, where did I put that part of it? That's it. All right.

INVOLVEMENT WITH MARTIN LUTHER KING EVENT

Francesco De Salvatore [01:16:29] Yeah. And so, could you maybe also talk about your involvement with the Martin Luther King event?

Rosa Byrd [01:16:35] Yeah. For years I attended all, each and as many of the Martin Luther King programs as I could.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:16:42] Mm hmm.

Rosa Byrd [01:16:43] One year I went to a program that I didn't particularly like. It had lots of young children, and the children had praise dancing. And it was almost like the praise dancing was a contest. And they were whooping and hollering and rooting.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:16:59] Yeah.

Rosa Byrd [01:16:59] That's not what I think the Martin Luther King program should be like.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:17:04] Mm hmm.

Rosa Byrd [01:17:05] So, we want young people, but we want them, you know, concentrating on what we went through, what we are trying to get, you know, through and help, you know, help improve things. But, anyway I went and I met Miss Mabel Lyles and when I came, went to the first meeting, she said you're the vice chair. Then, I didn't know at the time she was in there. Wait a minute. I want to tell you how long she was on there. She was there for nine years as chair. And then, when I went in the next year, she said, 'Now I'm going to be chair. And you be the vice. I mean, she's going to be vice chair and I'll be the chairman.' And we worked hard to get the program. We, you know, we approached churches and asked to use their building. We asked donations for food and programs and etcetera. And we worked with the city because the city is part of our sponsorship. And I, you asked which was the best one. It was this last one that we had at the Masonic Temple. That's a place that I know a lot of black people had never been inside in all these years, and they've told me that was a wonderful program. The young lady that put together our program with the panel and the singing and the praise dancers. It was wonderful. But, people came that had never been before. And, we want to keep that new kinship growing so we can again get back to what they used to be. They used to have young people be ushers. They started it, then when they got it, they would go all the way through high school and they'd get a prize from, an award from the Martin Luther King Committee when they graduated from high school and doing, you know, the pandemic we didn't have young people anymore. That's what we want to get back to. And then we want teenage children, so they can be conscious of voting. Be conscious of race. I think a lot of things have changed, but we still have a long ways to go.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:19:25] Mm hmm. And so, when did the MLK event start? When?

Rosa Byrd [01:19:30] It's 50 years ago.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:19:32] 50 years ago. Right. Right. Okay.

Rosa Byrd [01:19:33] Yeah. This was our 50th year.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:19:37] Yeah. Great.

Rosa Byrd [01:19:37] That we, and the city worked along with Alice Morgan. She was there thirty-six years.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:19:44] Wow.

Rosa Byrd [01:19:44] Before she stepped down. And then, Ms. Lyles was there for nine. And there was another lady in between, but I've never been able to Google to find out how many years she was there. But, I am the fourth chairperson.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:19:58] And why did this start? Like why, like what was the reason behind?

Rosa Byrd [01:20:03] When he was assassinated.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:20:09] Sure yeah.

Rosa Byrd [01:20:10] We wanted this, what's the name? Allison Morgan. Oh, I was younger then and I didn't get involved to start with, but she wanted his life to be a holiday and that was, we marched for a holiday. I have pictures of us going and marching over to watch and marching on the monument asking for a holiday. But she had wonderful programs and when it first started out, it was really interracial.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:20:42] Yeah.

Rosa Byrd [01:20:42] Lots of people, lots of ministers. But, you know, just like anything else, after the years, it started to dwindle down.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:20:50] Yeah.

Rosa Byrd [01:20:50] So our efforts will be to get it going again. And every year that people, that have like-minds in his dream was we all being one.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:21:01] Mm hmm.

Rosa Byrd [01:21:01] And things have been, we know things have improved. But then again, then you had the shooting like I don't know what place it was in.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:21:13] Mm hmm.

Rosa Byrd [01:21:13] Where the guy shot and killed, I just know it was a girl. Two girls. The guy killed his siblings.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:21:20] Mm hmm.

Rosa Byrd [01:21:21] It was at the, was it a shopping mall?

Francesco De Salvatore [01:21:25] Mm hmm.

Rosa Byrd [01:21:27] A shopping mall. One family left a little boy alone and two sisters. Eight were killed.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:21:36] Mm hmm.

Rosa Byrd [01:21:36] And two sisters. Second and third grade. They had their pictures in there. That kind of stuff just makes you cry.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:21:43] Mm hmm.

Rosa Byrd [01:21:44] Um, because we still need to reach out to each other. And there is room enough for everybody.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:21:49] Right.

Rosa Byrd [01:21:50] If we can get that going a bit.

HOPES FOR THE FUTURE & CLOSING REMARKS

Francesco De Salvatore [01:21:53] That's great. That's great. Is there anything, so I have some closing questions, but is there anything that I haven't asked you, that you want to talk about before I ask some of my last questions?

Rosa Byrd [01:22:04] I think well, let me look at my paper one more time.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:22:08] You have a lot of notes.

Rosa Byrd [01:22:09] Yeah. Oh no, I was just writing. The school closure, we talked about that. It's that we got to be a STEM school after that. We had, you asked about a civic association and we did and tried anti-drug things campaign and the city manager. Oh, that's it. And then, and you asked me about my family.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:22:32] Great.

Rosa Byrd [01:22:33] We got them all covered. And I told you about Ruby Tucker's scholarship and mine. Um, and that book I told you.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:22:43] Yeah.

Rosa Byrd [01:22:45] That was good.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:22:47] Yeah. I will look at it. It's great.

Rosa Byrd [01:22:48] Mm hmmm.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:22:49] Great. So some of my questions, my last questions are, you know, like, what are your hopes for the future of your children? Of your grandchildren?

Rosa Byrd [01:23:01] My children, my daughters, they moved back to this area because you asked me, how did they feel. One lives around that corner and my son lives around that way and they don't want to move from Alexandria either. And I said, that speaks volumes there. I started a family and my children are very family oriented. I have nine in my family. There's twelve in my husband's family. So all they've grown up with was family. So, you know, there are other people in the world, but your family is the thing that holds the thing together. And now my oldest son, my granddaughter works for the Alexandria City Public Schools. She graduated TC (Williams High School). The oldest grandson, he just moved in June of this year to San Diego. He was here, had a job, had his own apartment. The younger one is here. He works from some agency in the city. They were always at these things. You say you're going to this evening, ATF and CD. This is a nonprofit group to try to help young boys. They go to the, I never can remember what it is, but he's still there and he's getting his masters now. Here in the city. So they don't, um, the one that moved away, just came up and he wanted to move to its end. But, I love it because my daughter is up that way, my granddaughter got an apartment up that way.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:24:36] Yeah.

Rosa Byrd [01:24:37] Then it is still, it is still like maybe a rural area, but it's just not rural anymore.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:24:43] Yeah.

Rosa Byrd [01:24:43] But we still all and we go to different churches.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:24:47] Mm hmm.

Rosa Byrd [01:24:48] But we still attend church, so.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:24:51] That's beautiful. Yeah.

Rosa Byrd [01:24:52] Mhm.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:24:53] And my last question is like, if there's a memory you can hold onto for the rest of your life, what would it be?

Francesco De Salvatore [01:25:02] Oh. Oh. If it's not, without me. Without me thinking of family, whatever. And when we sang the Negro National Anthem at the Masonic Temple. This last, I cried the first three verses of it.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:25:29] It was during the MLK event?

Rosa Byrd [01:25:30] The Fiftieth MLK event. Because, I was so grateful for seeing what I thought, he would have wanted to see. People all ages, children, adults and everybody. In that room, I felt that we were all on the same page. It was, it was just overwhelming. That program. I usually cry when I hear that song anyway, but.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:26:04] Yeah.

Rosa Byrd [01:26:04] It meant so much more, because this was the time that, we've been to several churches and the churches have been running over. We have these, the panel that we had talked about race relations and that set the tone, I believe, for what we are going through. We need what the Jewish community remembering, having their remembrance.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:26:34] Yeah.

Rosa Byrd [01:26:34] Or if it's us, I think as long as we stop and pause a moment. We don't have to concentrate on it. But, lets all of us for one moment realize we're in this thing together. And what, I think that Dr. King says something about we will perish, we will either come together or we will all perish at one time, or something, some quote like that. But, I will tell you, from my civic work, not my life and not my family, I can go and give you a whole lot of those things. But just for, you know, being a citizen here in this in Alexandria. And now I forgot I worked, I've been an election official for almost forty years.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:27:17] Right you mentioned that.

Rosa Byrd [01:27:19] At Cora Kelly School so.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:27:20] That is great.

Rosa Byrd [01:27:21] That's one of my things to be proud of. I probably won't work anymore. I mean, the last time I said that was it. And then this. We didn't have a primary this time.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:27:33] Yeah.

Rosa Byrd [01:27:34] I was disheartened. Well, I was hoping that when Trump got out, but if he gets back in, I can't take it anymore. I will throw in the towel. No, I don't want to go back any more. So I thank you.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:27:50] Yeah, no, thank you. It's been great, Ms. Byrd.

Rosa Byrd [01:27:52] Yeah.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:27:53] Thank you so much.

Rosa Byrd [01:27:54] Yeah. And if, I've been proud of a, one day Ellen Miller called me to come and I was nominated for the Citizen of the Year for the Alexandria Gazette and.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:28:09] Yeah.

Rosa Byrd [01:28:09] Lots of awards I've gotten that you know you wouldn't get but, I love the schools. I know we've been through problems with the school and I just feel like we won.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:28:24] Yeah.

Rosa Byrd [01:28:25] And we didn't lose our neighborhood.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:28:27] Yeah.

Rosa Byrd [01:28:27] You know, to let it go. And it was because of collaboration.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:28:32] Right.

Rosa Byrd [01:28:32] People, the churches too.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:28:35] Great.

Rosa Byrd [01:28:35] Through that.

Francesco De Salvatore [01:28:36] All right. Well, thank you so much, Ms. Byrd.

Rosa Byrd [01:28:38] Thank you.