



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



Oral History Interview

with

Vanessa Greene

Interviewer: *Kerry James Reed*

Narrator: *Vanessa Greene*

Location of Interview:

Charles Houston Rec Center, 901 Wythe St, Alexandria, VA 22314

Date of Interview: *5/31/2024*

Transcriber: *Kerry James Reed*

Summary:

Vanessa Greene reflects on Growing up in Colored Rosemont, her memories of the neighborhood and Community of Colored Rosemont, her family, her career teaching the youth and elders in the community, and her experiences with her Faith

Notes:

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General	Family; Gentrification; African-American Neighborhoods; Families—History; Genealogy; Black Business Enterprises; Displacement; Childhood and Youth; Integration; Early Childhood Special Education; Elderly Education; Faith; Historically Black Colleges and Universities; Black History; Cooking; Neighborhood; Neighborhood Leaders; Community Gardens
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People	Vanessa Greene; Veronica Greene-Pace; Tammy Greene; Robin Greene-Schofield; Stanley Greene; John Greene; John Henry Greene; Carrie Ellen Greene; Howard Randolph Allen; Fred Major; Mary Armstrong Cross; Deborah Turner; Kieth Cross; Sharo Cross; Sheila Cross-Reid; Bertha Griffin; Wandra Griffin; Antoinette Burke; Robert Burke; Rozier Burke; Kevin Burke; Hayward Cross; Bernice Dundas; Lydia Cross-Jones; Eleanor Cross-Lynnbush; Legree Bass; Douglass Bass Jr.; Harold Bass; Linda Louise Bass; Damean Payne; Janey Terry; Shirley Terry; Diane Terry; Anett Jones-Punch; Nellie B. Quander; Reverend Lee Earle
Places	Colored Rosemont; Wyth St; Charles Houston Elementary School; Charles Houston Rec Center; Parker-Gray Historic District; Parker-Gray High School; Black History Museum; Madison St; Pendleton St; Gibbon St; West St; T.C. Williams High School; Alexandria City High School; George Washington High School; Virginia State University; Blue Run Baptist Church; Russel Temple Christian Methodist Episcopal Church; Rosemont; Freedmen’s Hospital, Washington D.C.; Alexandria, VA; N West St; Payne St; Braddock Rd; Watson’s Store; Regal’s Restaurant; Oronoco St; Johnson Swimming Pool; Norwalk, CT; Middletown, CT; Barboursville, VA; Cameron Valley Child Development Center; Ladrey Redevelopment Community; Shiloh Baptist Church

Vanessa Greene: [00:00:01] Vanessa K green. I am 69 years old. Today is May 31st, 2024, and I am currently at the Charles Houston Recreation Center in Alexandria, Virginia. [00:00:16][15.4]

Kerry James Reed: [00:00:18] My name is Kerry James Reed. I am 27 years of age as the 31st of May, 2024, and we are at the Charles Houston Rec Center. So thank you so much, Ms. Vanessa, for agreeing to do this interview. It's been a pleasure getting to know you over these past couple months. I suppose we can start from the very beginning. Where were you born? [00:00:33][15.7]

Vanessa Greene: [00:00:36] I was actually born at Freedmen's Hospital in Washington, DC. [00:00:40][4.0]

Kerry James Reed: [00:00:42] Freedman's Hospital in Washington, D.C. was your family living in Alexandria at the time? [00:00:47][5.4]

Vanessa Greene: [00:00:49] Yes. My first three siblings, older siblings were born, actually in the house that we lived in, in Alexandria. However, because I was born in 1954 and still segregation existed, I was born in Freedman's Hospital. That was the only hospital Black women could actually give birth in. [00:01:11][22.0]

Kerry James Reed: [00:01:13] So, Alexandria didn't have any? [00:01:14][1.0]

Vanessa Greene: [00:01:15] My mother's doctor didn't have privileges at Alexandria Hospital. [00:01:19][4.5]

Kerry James Reed: [00:01:20] I see. [00:01:20][0.0]

Vanessa Greene: [00:01:22] I was the first and only sibling to be born in Washington, D.C. And my two younger sisters under me were actually born in Alexandria Hospital. [00:01:30][8.4]

Kerry James Reed: [00:01:34] So, where was your family living when you were born? [00:01:36][2.3]

Vanessa Greene: [00:01:38] Where we grew up, 1312 Wythe St. [00:01:42][3.9]

Kerry James Reed: [00:01:42] 1312 Wythe St. So, that street, that area is known as Colored Rosemont? [00:01:51][8.7]

Vanessa Greene: [00:01:52] Correct. [00:01:52][0.0]

Kerry James Reed: [00:01:52] And I was curious, when did you begin to have an awareness that you were living in Colored Rosemont? [00:01:58][6.0]

Vanessa Greene: [00:02:00] Probably when I was about ten. [00:02:04][4.3]

Kerry James Reed: [00:02:05] Ten. Ok. What sort of spurred that awareness? [00:02:11][5.9]

Vanessa Greene: [00:02:12] Because of the fact that we lived in a neighborhood, a cluster neighborhood, privately owned homes by Blacks, and we lived on tree lined streets. However, under the bridge, Mount Vernon Avenue and beyond was known as White Rosemont. And because, the houses weren't necessarily similar, but because they were in neighborhoods that were like white Rosemont, it was Colored Rosemont. Because you had Black homeowners, and we did have tree lined streets and all that good stuff. [00:02:54][41.9]

Kerry James Reed: [00:02:57] That's interesting. I never heard tree lined streets mentioned in all of our meetings. Really? Tree lined streets? That's fascinating. Do you remember what kind of trees they were? [00:03:03][6.8]

Vanessa Greene: [00:03:04] I don't recall the type of trees. I'm just going to go out on a limb and say Maple and Oak trees. I know that next door to our, adjacent to our backyard, which was initially the Major's family's plot of land, that there was a mulberry tree and the branches used to hang over in our backyard. And when they were ripe and we would, you know, pick them and eat them. And we had a tree that actually grew in our front yard, which was a huge tree. And there were trees right along the curb, you know, the sidewalk going up the street from West St to Payne St. Because we lived in the block of Wythe St that was bounded by N West Street on the west and N Payne St on the east. [00:03:58][54.2]

Kerry James Reed: [00:04:02] Interesting. So, it seems like the neighborhood you grew up in was very, lush in terms of, you know, fauna and things. [00:04:07][5.7]

Vanessa Greene: [00:04:09] Yes, yes. Like I said, tree lined streets, you know, and I guess that's the correlation between the two different Rosemonts. [00:04:19][10.0]

Kerry James Reed: [00:04:22] Absolutely. So, you talked about it a bit with the tree lined streets and where your home on 1312 Wythe St was in relation to West St and everything else. Could you, maybe in broader terms, define Colored Rosemont for those who aren't familiar with it? [00:04:38][16.3]

Vanessa Greene: [00:04:40] Could you be a little clearer? [00:04:42][2.0]

Kerry James Reed: [00:04:42] Of course. So how you conceptualize the neighborhood Colored Rosemont now, right? If you could just briefly describe what it is when you think of Colored Rosemont, what do you think of? [00:04:56][14.1]

Vanessa Greene: [00:04:57] I think of the families that resided in the homes, in our exact block, as well as those who were in the 700 block of N West Street, because we were similar in age. I should say ages, because my older siblings, Veronica, John and Stanley, they were of the same age as some of the residents as well. And just a community, you know. While we had different households, everybody knew each other. We weren't in and out of each other's houses all the time, no. But as neighborhood children, we played together, you know, in the empty field after the Majors left and the Armstrongs

left, that piece of property that was next door to us was a field. And Mr. Major subsequently turned it into a garden. But before he did that, that was a field that we used to play games on, like dodgeball, kickball, and, you know, baseball, softball, those kind of games. [00:06:06][69.4]

Kerry James Reed: [00:06:07] Absolutely. So, do you have an earliest memory of Colored Rosemont? Do you have anything like that? [00:06:17][9.4]

Vanessa Greene: [00:06:19] I do, mostly of what I said, you know, prior to this question. I, remember Christmas time, everybody always decorated for Christmas on the outside. I remember, like I said, the games that we used to play in the summertime, playing in the snow. And that's just about it, you know, just doing average children things. I grew up in the era where we had to be very creative with playing. We didn't have computers. We didn't have cell phones, of course. So, we were very creative. We played a lot of hopscotch, jump rope. And I used to love to play marbles with the guys. And I was thinking, sitting here and thinking, Kerry, about playing hopscotch. We used to use pieces of glass from the soda bottles as a marker, you know, like you would place it on one, two. And then as the numbers increased, you had to really, you know, handle it to throw it. And I'm thinking, you know, you wouldn't do that today because that's dangerous. For some reason, I don't remember any jagged edges being on the pieces of glass that we used for hopscotch. Let me put my phone on silent. [00:07:49][90.5]

Kerry James Reed: [00:07:51] That's so interesting. Was there a reason you all used glass? [00:07:54][3.0]

Vanessa Greene: [00:07:56] That was the only thing that we could use, or a rock, or a rock. But I think glass, for some reason, went further. [00:08:04][8.2]

Kerry James Reed: [00:08:07] Ok. [00:08:07][0.0]

Vanessa Greene: [00:08:07] That's the recollection that I have. [00:08:09][1.6]

Kerry James Reed: [00:08:09] Very interesting. [00:08:10][0.2]

Vanessa Greene: [00:08:12] [lights turn off] It went off because it doesn't detect any movement. [00:08:17][4.4]

Kerry James Reed: [00:08:18] Ahh, I see. [00:08:18][0.0]

Vanessa Greene: [00:08:18] They are sensed. [00:08:18][0.1]

Kerry James Reed: [00:08:20] So you also played marbles? [00:08:22][2.6]

Vanessa Greene: [00:08:23] With the boys. [00:08:23][0.4]

Kerry James Reed: [00:08:24] With the boys. Would you play that in the field as well? [00:08:26][2.5]

Vanessa Greene: [00:08:26] No. In between the sections, you know. There's a sidewalk, and then before you get to the curb, there's the ground. Sometimes it has grass, sometimes it's just ground, it's just dirt. And that's where we would play. We couldn't venture too far from our house. So it was, you know, right in close proximity to our home. And I would play with the boys in the dirt. You know, they draw the circle, and we do the, I used to love the big, they would call them 'Tiger Eye Marble, that big one. And then they'd knock the rest of the marbles out of the circle. That was fun. And I don't remember any other girls in the neighborhood beside myself that would play with my brothers and the Burke brothers and Keith Cross, I believe. [00:09:24][57.7]

Kerry James Reed: [00:09:26] Interesting. Was play in the neighborhood really divided along those gender lines, do you remember? [00:09:33][7.4]

Vanessa Greene: [00:09:34] We would play games together. There were, like, girls that were near my age and maybe a little younger. We would do, it was girls only, like hopscotch, jump rope. The guys didn't jump rope and then they didn't play hopscotch. But, we combined boys and girls together to play dodgeball, kickball, softball. [00:10:00][25.9]

Kerry James Reed: [00:10:02] Ok. So, you mentioned that you couldn't venture very far? [00:10:07][5.6]

Vanessa Greene: [00:10:08] Yeah. Our mother would not allow us to go any further than where she could see us. [00:10:14][6.4]

Kerry James Reed: [00:10:24] So, you began to mention the, the Crosses and the Majors and some of the other families that lived in Colored Rosemont. Could you describe your immediate neighbors? I guess to the left and right and across from you? [00:10:39][15.3]

Vanessa Greene: [00:10:40] Ok. When I came along to know, the neighbors, the neighborhood, the Majors had moved. The Armstrong family was living in the house that the Majors owned. And I think Mary Armstrong Cross came to one of your meetings. She was from that family. That family of kids, they were older, much older than me. So, there was nobody that was in my age category. But, played a lot with Debbie [Deborah] Turner and her sisters, they lived directly across the street from us. And then, the Crosses, it was Keith, Sharo, these are Sheila Cross-Reid's siblings. And, around the corner, not every home on our block had children. Around the corner there was, Bertha Griffin, who raised her great niece Wandra. She was my brother John's contemporary, but we did activities together. Then you had the Burkes, Antoinette, Robert Jr., we called him "chipper," Rozier, we called him "Ro-Ro," and Kevin was the younger sibling. So, my brothers play more with Chipper and Ro-Ro because they were near the same age. And then on the end of West St, there was Dundas-Cross. You had Hayward Cross, who was married to Bernice Dundas, and they had two daughters together. Lydia, I think she came to one of the earlier meetings, Lydia Cross Jones and Eleanor Cross Lynnbush. Now, Lydia and my brother John were classmates, and Eleanor, she's a couple of years ahead of me but we were still, like, contemporaries together. And then on the right of us was the Bass family. Now, all of them were older than me. The youngest brother, his name is Legree but we called him "Sunny." He and my brother Stanley were contemporaries. And there were three boys, or guys. The oldest, Douglas jr. Harold, Louise was the only girl. Linda Louise was the only girl. And then Legree. Now, Linda Louise was my parent's goddaughter. And she had a daughter who subsequently became my parent's goddaughter. Her name is Damean. And so, Damean was more or less like our younger sister because she would tag along with us or be a part of our family events. So, basically, oh, and the Terrys, on the corner of Wythe St and Payne St. Janie Terry's family. Her oldest daughter was Shirley, she was a couple years ahead of me. And then she had younger siblings. So I knew mostly Shirley and Diane. But, for some reason, I don't think we played a lot with them. I think they moved in later. And then around in the 600 block of West St, there were, were the Jones-Punch family. And the older girl Arnett was right underneath me and Shirley. We knew the whole family, but just naming the ones that were closer to my age. And the Hill family was right at the corner of Pendleton St and West St in the 600 block of West, but they didn't bother much with playing with our family. They may have played with others in the neighborhood, but they didn't play with us. [00:15:32][292.6]

Kerry James Reed: [00:15:35] It's amazing. You describe such a vibrant community, full of children, full people playing with each other, full of community relations as well. [00:15:42][6.5]

Vanessa Greene: [00:15:42] Exactly. [00:15:42][0.0]

Kerry James Reed: [00:15:43] It's incredible. I'm sorry. One more time. So, who's your parent's goddaughter? I'm sorry. [00:15:49][6.0]

Vanessa Greene: [00:15:50] Her name is Demean Bass Payne, P-A-Y-N-E. Oh, I'm sorry. Linda Louise Bass was my parent's goddaughter, and then her daughter became my mother and father's goddaughter as well. [00:16:12][22.5]

Kerry James Reed: [00:16:13] Ok, fabulous. Can you describe what your home looked like on 1312 [Wythe St]? [00:16:20][6.9]

Vanessa Greene: [00:16:21] It very small house, but it had a lot of love. We had living room, dining room, kitchen, one bath and two bedrooms. My parents had one bedroom and the four of us girls shared a bedroom. And the boys slept on the pullout sofa bed. So if we had company, they would have to sit up until the company left so they could go to bed. [00:16:48][26.7]

Kerry James Reed: [00:16:50] That's funny. What was your favorite place in your home? [00:16:54][4.6]

Vanessa Greene: [00:16:56] I would say, actually, as a young person, under the dining room table. Because, it took you to a different place. I would pretend that I was living somewhere else. That was a space that was only mine. [00:17:13][17.0]

Kerry James Reed: [00:17:14] Interesting. What did the living room look like? [00:17:22][7.6]

Vanessa Greene: [00:17:25] We had the TV, couch and, you know, chair lamps and stuff. But I remember vividly the main door, front door, had a lot of panes with glass in it. It was a white door and it had several panes, this scar I'm still wearing today, right on my arm. That one. My sister Robin and I, Robin is two years younger than myself, and we hadn't actually started grade school yet. And we would always watch Captain Kangaroo in the morning. And, she was Mr. Green Jeans and I was the Dancing Bear and we were dancing around and my mother had said, "sit down before you fall and hurt yourself." And we kept dancing and dancing and then I fell and my elbow went through the glass pane. And I remember I had seven stitches. [00:18:36][71.4]

Kerry James Reed: [00:18:37] Oh my goodness. [00:18:37][0.2]

Vanessa Greene: [00:18:39] And at that time, our father worked in the government. Well, he had several jobs, but his main 9 to 5 was in the government at the Pentagon. He ran the service center. So, my mother had to call him to come to take me to the emergency room and get my arm stitched up. So, that's a vivid memory that storm door. Not the storm door, the main door. And this scar that's forever with me. [00:19:15][35.7]

Kerry James Reed: [00:19:15] Oh, yeah. Absolutely. Did you listen to your mother after that, about dancing? [00:19:20][4.7]

Vanessa Greene: [00:19:20] Well, it was [laughs]my mother was a strict disciplinarian. So, you know, it wasn't that I was being disobedient, I guess, but it was just, you know, being a child, you just keep dancing around. So, needless to say, I didn't dance like the Dancing Bear anymore after that incident. [00:19:44][24.0]

Kerry James Reed: [00:19:45] Certainly. So, one thing that you all have talked about a lot in our meetings is the meals that your parents would prepare. And I was particularly interested in that because when I talked to your brothers, they talked a lot about your father being an outdoorsman. And, you know, the his insistence upon having meat with dinner and things like that. But I was curious that your perspective on everything. What do you remember about the ways that your parents prepared meals? [00:20:17][32.6]

Vanessa Greene: [00:20:20] To this very day buffets don't impress me. And people's people tend to think because it's a lot of food, it's good food. We always had steak; it wasn't a special occasion to have steak. We always had things that most people would just generally have on special occasions. So I guess didn't realize at the time just how blessed we were because my father knew how to garden. And he raised, even though we lived in the city, he raised with a friend, livestock like pigs. They would slaughter the pigs, the hogs, in the fall. And he knew how to cut up the portions of meat, to make bacon, to make ham, to make what we call shoulder, the shoulder of the hog. Oh my God, that was good eating for breakfast and on the weekend mornings. I would prefer shoulder over ham. He cured the meat; he would sugar cure the meat and hang it up in the, we called it the coal shed, the shed that we had in the back yard. But, always any and plenty. My mother cooked, sometimes she would have more than one meat. And then, of course, the subsequent side dishes, like green vegetable and a starch, sometimes two green vegetables or two starches. My sister Veronica, and probably my brother Stanley, and maybe John as well, they will always say we had more than enough for eight. It was a total of eight of us eating, and we could feed eight more after that. That's how my mother cooked. And she was an excellent cook and baker. And one thing about her, she could prepare a meal very quickly. And even though she prepared it quickly, it was always very tasty. She's well renowned for her baked goods, her homemade rolls, yeast rolls, biscuits, you know, cakes, cobblers, stuff like that. And not using canned ingredients, all fresh ingredients. She did the canning process in the summertime. Just certain things about the different seasons will bring you back to different memories. She made jelly, homemade jelly, from fresh fruit. Usually, this time of the year, and later on in June, cherries. We had a cherry tree, but it wasn't a sweet cherry, it was a tart cherry tree. But she would make, you know, cherry cobbler, cherry wine, cherry jellies, all of it. And then she would ca whatever daddy would yield from the garden like green beans, lima beans, green Lima beans, tomatoes. And I will always remember the pressure cooker because she would do a lot of cooking, like the preparation of the jellies and stuff. She would have used the pressure cooked with the mason jars, her process for doing that. And also because we couldn't stop at a lot of restaurants. Number one because, you know, back then blacks couldn't stop a restaurant. But we were a large family, and that would've been really expensive to try to feed eight people in the restaurant. Waking up in the morning to smell the fried chicken and other goodies that she was preparing to pack as a lunch whenever we would take trips to visit family up north, Philadelphia and Connecticut. So that's a vivid memory. And like I said, this time of the year, her getting ready to do her canning and she always put down wine and just depends on what type of wine she was making at the time. So, yeah, that kind of stuff. [00:25:05][284.8]

Kerry James Reed: [00:25:07] Your parents sound incredibly skilled in terms of, you know, being able to provide for themselves. [00:25:13][6.3]

Vanessa Greene: [00:25:14] Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. As we've mentioned in the meetings, the various jobs that daddy had, one of which, with the GI Bill, he was in the Navy, he went to watchmaker school. And he would repair watches for folks in the neighborhood or on his job or whatever to add to the income of the house. And then he was a part time meat cutter for Giant food for 27 years. So, when I think of my dad, that's all I think about, how he always worked to provide for his family. [00:25:57][42.9]

Kerry James Reed: [00:25:57] Absolutely. Did you have a favorite dish or favorite meal your mother and father would prepare? [00:26:04][6.4]

Vanessa Greene: [00:26:06] Yes. Macaroni and cheese. And to this day is still my go to comfort. [00:26:08][2.5]

Kerry James Reed: [00:26:09] Mac and cheese? [00:26:09][0.4]

Vanessa Greene: [00:26:09] Mac and cheese. [00:26:10][0.5]

Kerry James Reed: [00:26:10] Absolutely. [00:26:10][0.0]

Vanessa Greene: [00:26:11] Yeah. Mac and cheese. That was my favorite. And of course, anything she made. And her yeast rolls. And I loved her Cherry cobbler, I mean blackberry cobbler, Peach cobbler. And she made excellent gingerbread with the lemon icing on it, and it was very good, very good. And then she made what we now call coffee cake. We used to call it crumb cake. But a big, you know, like in a sheet pan. And whatever she made on Sunday because we did not buy lunch unless it was a special occasion. We took our lunch to school, and whatever she cooked on Sunday, particularly if it was roast beef or roast lamb or ham, would be in our lunch for Monday. And that would also include whatever dessert she made on Sunday. [00:27:16][64.3]

Kerry James Reed: [00:27:18] Sounds fabulous. I'm curious because you mentioned that the Majors had a garden that was next to your house as well, and then your father also had a garden? [00:27:27][9.2]

Vanessa Greene: [00:27:27] Yeah, his garden was around the corner of Dundas property, he would garden over there. One of his gardens was around there. [00:27:38][10.8]

Kerry James Reed: [00:27:39] Do you remember a lot of people in the neighborhood having gardens? [00:27:42][3.1]

Vanessa Greene: [00:27:46] Yes. [00:27:46][0.0]

Kerry James Reed: [00:27:50] Interesting. And they all, like the Majors and like your father's, would grow greens and tomatoes and things like that? [00:28:03][12.8]

Vanessa Greene: [00:28:04] A lot of them had corn, green beans, green onions. Just a typical garden fair. [00:28:19][15.5]

Kerry James Reed: [00:28:27] So we talked before a little bit about how you weren't allowed to venture too far from your home. And I was curious, growing up, did you know, this is probably not best way to phrase it, the boundaries of Colored Rosemont. We spent some time in our meetings looking at the maps and things like that where, you know, the official quote unquote jurisdiction of Colored Rosemont would be. But growing up, where did you feel like the boundaries of your neighborhood ended? Where you were no longer in that community where you felt, you know, safe at home? [00:29:02][34.6]

Vanessa Greene: [00:29:06] Under the bridge. We always call it under the bridge, under Braddock Road. And by G.W. High School. It was high school then. You couldn't go further than the 7-11. And then under the railroad tracks, you could not go. I remember that very vividly. Up until, I would say until I was about 11 or 12 years old. [00:29:33][27.2]

Kerry James Reed: [00:29:35] Okay. Interesting. Were there any businesses in Colored Rosemont? [00:29:41][6.0]

Vanessa Greene: [00:29:41] Oh, yeah. We had a grocer, that was Dorsey's store that sat in the 1200 block of Madison St. [00:29:52][10.7]

Kerry James Reed: [00:29:55] Dorsey's? [00:29:55][0.0]

Vanessa Greene: [00:29:55] D-O-R-S-E-Y. And that family is the Watson family that owned that. And they owned that store, as well as another restaurant that was called Regal's. R-E-G-A-L'S. And that was more or less like a restaurant. But Dorsey's was the local grocer, where you could buy penny candy. You could buy, you know, hosiery, hair pomade. Just a little bit of everything. Starch, because I remember, then you had to cook starch, to use for ironing clothes. Veronica could probably explain it a little better than I could, because it was more early on. I never used it, when I was old enough to start ironing, it was spray starch. [00:31:00][64.5]

Kerry James Reed: [00:31:00] Ok. I've only ever been familiar with the spray starch. That's interesting. I didn't know you had to cook it before [00:31:05][4.8]

Vanessa Greene: [00:31:07] It was a chalky like substance. And you cooked it and cooked it until it, she can explain that better than I can. [00:31:15][8.4]

Kerry James Reed: [00:31:15] It makes sense now that I think about it, but I never thought about that before, interesting. So, do you have a favorite aspect of Colored Rosemont that you remember? We talked a lot about, you know, your parents excellent cooking, all your friends. But is there a particular memory or particular occurrence that you can point out? [00:31:38][22.4]

Vanessa Greene: [00:31:44] I remember, the water shows in the summertime at Johnson Pool, that was always the highlight. And then the games at Parker-Gray High School. Their homecoming was a big deal. When I attended Parker-Gray it was a middle school. Because by then the schools had totally integrated. And I remember thinking, 'what's the hoopla about all this?' It just seemed so small to me. Well, it was a little larger because by then they had built in addition to it, a newer addition. But basically the Johnson pool, the summertime water shows, that was highlight at the end of the swimming season. They would do a big production for that. Basically, as I got older I had friends who lived in the 500 block of N Payne St and in the 1200 block of Oronoco St, so I was allowed to go to visit them. [00:33:11][87.4]

Kerry James Reed: [00:33:19] Could you tell me more about these water shows? I've never heard about those before. [00:33:24][5.3]

Vanessa Greene: [00:33:26] I don't know if Black History [Museum], if Audrey has access to the slides. The gentleman's name was Harry Burke, and he used to record them and put them on those little slot thingies [microfilm]. You know how they were a little, similar to what you would put in those things? The toy as a child? I can't even think of it where you put it inside and you slide it across, you can see different pictures. But they were big productions. You actually thought you were looking at something that was done by professional performers. Diving, a lot of lights, colored lights, you know,

it was very bright and colorful. And just the routines that folks did, that was just amazing. So, that was a highlight for me. Although I still can't swim to this day, but I love being by the water. And being in the water as long as it doesn't come above my chest area. But, that as well as going to parades like GW parade, for George Washington's birthday, just stuff like that. Going to the frozen custard place, the Polar Bear, with the polar bear, because our parents, especially my father, always would take us for a ride. When I say for a ride, take us to different places, especially in the summertime to cool us off. And we would ride down Mount Vernon Ave and then we would end with either going to the frozen custard place or Haas ice cream store. We used to do Easter activities over at the Masonic Temple, Rolling Easter eggs for Easter. But that was later on. [00:35:47][141.2]

Kerry James Reed: [00:35:53] Were there a lot of community events like this that went on in Colored Rosemont? [00:35:56][3.0]

Vanessa Greene: [00:35:58] Other than if it was that Parker-Gray High School? Like I said, their homecoming and the to see their marching and the GW parade, and the water shows in the summertime, that was basically it. And we kept saying, and I'm sorry that a lot of the original, or the elders of Colored Rosemont have passed on now. Particularly one, Sheila Cross-Reid's mother. She always wanted to do a Colored Rosemont reunion, as well as Debbie [Deborah] Turner's mother and aunt. They always talked about, a Colored Rosemont reunion. But that never took place. We never got it off the ground. And just respecting, a matter of respecting, you know, your elders. And our father was like the councilor of the neighborhood. Anybody who had a problem, a lot of folks would come and talk to him. [00:37:04][66.3]

Kerry James Reed: [00:37:10] So you mentioned your father a lot, could you tell us his name? [00:37:13][2.8]

Vanessa Greene: [00:37:14] John Henry green. [00:37:15][1.1]

Kerry James Reed: [00:37:15] John Henry green. [00:37:16][0.8]

Vanessa Greene: [00:37:18] Yes. [00:37:18][0.0]

Kerry James Reed: [00:37:21] And could you could you describe him a little? You've done so in passing, but just the overall description of your father physically and, you know, character. [00:37:30][9.8]

Vanessa Greene: [00:37:32] My sister Veronica swears I look just like him. I think I have a picture of my parents on my keychain. [Vanessa shows a picture of her parents] [00:37:41][9.1]

Kerry James Reed: [00:37:44] Oh, yeah. Oh, wow. That's amazing. When was this photo taken? [00:37:53][9.0]

Vanessa Greene: [00:37:54] At my sister Robin's wedding reception. She got married June 28th, 1980. So that's from circa 1980. [00:38:01][6.8]

Kerry James Reed: [00:38:02] That's beautiful. [00:38:02][0.2]

Vanessa Greene: [00:38:03] Yeah. Yeah. So, my sister says I look like him. She always says, "you look like your father and your father's people." So that's him. All four of us girls are daddy's girls. [00:38:20][17.3]

Kerry James Reed: [00:38:21] Absolutely. [00:38:21][0.0]

Vanessa Greene: [00:38:22] Yeah. And he just was the epitome of what a father should be, should be everybody's father. And, he was, like I said, our mother was the disciplinarian. If daddy had to talk

to you, you know you were in big trouble. And he never raised his voice. He talked in the same kind of like monotone tone that I'm talking in now. But it just would hurt your feelings because he had to talk to you. [00:38:52][30.3]

Kerry James Reed: [00:38:53] Yeah. [00:38:53][0.0]

Vanessa Greene: [00:38:54] You know, so you didn't want to disappoint them. [00:38:56][2.6]

Kerry James Reed: [00:38:59] Do you have a favorite memory of your father from when you were living in Colored Rosemont? [00:39:04][4.6]

Vanessa Greene: [00:39:06] Like I said, he was well-respected in the neighborhood. And [laughs] when they finally let us, my sister Robin and myself, have a backyard party one summer, he sat on the porch with a baseball bat. And if he saw anybody that didn't look like they were in our age group trying to come to the party, because, you know, when I was a teenager, it's like you hear about a party and you just go to it. And it was like, 'no, you can't come in. You look too old.' He didn't play anybody bothering his children, particularly his girls. And it was kind of funny, but it was also kind of embarrassing, where he sat on the porch the entire time with that baseball bat in between his leg. And, so, that's one of the many memories. And my father was, he'd do anything for anybody, but he was not a, he loved children, but he wasn't the type of person to be dramatic or, you know, when you work with kids being animated like that. And my earlier career was that of a preschool teacher. So, we needed a Santa Clause one year for our program. And so I said, "daddy, I need you to do me a favor," and I know it's out of his comfort level, but "I need you to be Santa Claus." And I was surprised that he did it, because I asked him to do it. And I know that wasn't in his comfort range to do that, but he did it anyway because I asked him to do it. [00:40:55][109.6]

Kerry James Reed: [00:40:58] That's terrific. [00:40:58][0.2]

Vanessa Greene: [00:41:00] Yeah, he's a pretty terrific man. [00:41:02][2.2]

Kerry James Reed: [00:41:04] So, you mentioned earlier that you all would occasionally go up to Philadelphia and I think you said Connecticut. [00:41:09][4.9]

Vanessa Greene: [00:41:10] Norwalk, Connecticut, Norwalk and Middletown, Connecticut, because my mother's, siblings and her side of the family, they migrated from Virginia to North Connecticut. And my father's older sister, oldest sister lived in Middletown, Connecticut. So it was like a two for we would visit our mother's side of the family, and then we would visit Aunt Mary. And that was daddy's oldest sister and her family. [00:41:39][28.7]

Kerry James Reed: [00:41:41] So, do you know any about your father's family history, where his people hail from? [00:41:46][5.5]

Vanessa Greene: [00:41:47] Yeah. Orange County, Barboursville, Virginia. [00:41:50][3.3]

Kerry James Reed: [00:41:55] Did he talk about his family history? [00:41:57][1.6]

Vanessa Greene: [00:41:57] Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. [00:41:58][0.7]

Kerry James Reed: [00:42:04] Was that something he emphasized? Made a special point about? [00:42:08][4.0]

Vanessa Greene: [00:42:08] Yeah, family was everything to my father, and he always instilled in us, and in fact his own siblings, about staying together and to, you know, to embrace family. Both of our parents instilled that in us. We're very close knit group. And, they always told us to stay together and look out for each other, and we do that. [00:42:38][30.0]

Kerry James Reed: [00:42:44] Can you describe your mother? What was her name? [00:42:46][1.5]

Vanessa Greene: [00:42:47] Carrie Ellen Green. [00:42:48][1.5]

Kerry James Reed: [00:42:52] Kerry? [00:42:52][0.0]

Vanessa Greene: [00:42:54] Not 'Kerry,' 'Carrie.' C-A-R-R-I-E. [00:42:57][3.0]

Kerry James Reed: [00:42:58] Ok. So many ways to spell it. Fabulous. And you've, you know, talked about her at length already as well, but I was wondering if you could do the same. Give a physical description and also speak to her character? [00:43:14][15.8]

Vanessa Greene: [00:43:15] She was a short, fat lady, ok. And she had a big personality, larger than life. She spoke what was on her mind, she didn't pull any punches. But she did remarkably well because she had limited education, she only had an eighth grade education. But you wouldn't know that. And education was very important to her. And she instilled in us to make sure that we went, you know, and did well with our education. And so, she was fiercely protective of her children. In fact, we had one neighbor that referred to us as the gold children. [00:44:05][49.8]

Kerry James Reed: [00:44:09] That's funny. Can you describe a fond memory you had with your mother growing up in Colored Rosemont? [00:44:14][4.7]

Vanessa Greene: [00:44:19] Her cooking, as well as, she was a prankster. That side of her. She would do things to make people laugh. And to, how can I say this? Let's just say that she was a prankster. I'll just leave it at that. [00:44:48][29.0]

Kerry James Reed: [00:44:52] And similarly, did she talk to you all about her family history? [00:44:56][3.4]

Vanessa Greene: [00:44:57] No, no. We knew her siblings. Her mother died when I was two, so I have no recollection of my maternal grandmother. The only grandparents I have fond and good memories of are my paternal grandparents. Because they were always in our lives. My life, I'll put it that way. No. And her siblings did not talk about their father either. That was a taboo subject. Nor did she talk about, we have an older brother that my mother brought to the marriage. She would not talk about his parentage, even. His paternal side of the family. And we knew not to ask, you know, because it was obviously something very painful. Because she had him out of wedlock as a teenager. He was old enough to be really my father. He was 19 years older than me. But, I have very fond memories of my brother. I mean, the significance was that he passed away the day after Kennedy was assassinated. I was nine years old, and his funeral was the day after JFK and he was also interred at Arlington National Cemetery. I remember she allowed us to go to the wake. When I say us: my brother John, myself and our two younger sisters, Robin and Tammy. Tammy was just four. She has no recollection of my brother. But we couldn't go to the service. Only Veronica and Stanley were allowed to go to the funeral. I guess because they were older. But no, she didn't talk about her father. We knew her siblings. We knew our aunts and uncles, we had relationships with them. But as far as her father was concerned, we had no, we've subsequently learned, you know, through the aid of, what is that? Ancestry [Ancestry.com]. We know her name now. And we knew that he was much older than our grandmother. But that's just generic information. But we don't know much about her. Like I said, we couldn't discuss that with her. [00:47:43][165.3]

Kerry James Reed: [00:47:43] Yeah. Interesting. What was your brother's name, the one that passed away? [00:47:49][5.5]

Vanessa Greene: [00:47:49] Howard Randolph Allen. [00:47:51][1.6]

Kerry James Reed: [00:47:52] Howard. Randolph. Allen. And he was interred at Arlington National [Cemetery]. [00:47:56][4.4]

Kerry James Reed: [00:47:57] Was he in the service? [00:47:58][0.4]

Vanessa Greene: [00:47:58] Yes. [00:47:58][0.0]

Kerry James Reed: [00:47:58] Ok. What branch? [00:48:02][3.8]

Vanessa Greene: [00:48:04] Air force. [00:48:04][0.2]

Kerry James Reed: [00:48:04] Air force. So, you've mentioned a little bit about some of the values that your parents tried to instill in yourself and your siblings, you know. Prioritize education, family, community values. Are there any traditions that that have been passed down from your parents? [00:48:28][23.5]

Vanessa Greene: [00:48:30] We still get together as a family unit for the major holidays. Even though, you know, we all have our own different families, you know, individual families. That's a tradition that continues to pass down in going to what we call, 'homecoming' at our father's church in Barboursville, Blue Run Baptist Church every fourth Sunday in August. [00:48:56][26.6]

Kerry James Reed: [00:48:57] Interesting. [00:48:57][0.0]

Vanessa Greene: [00:49:00] That's still something near and dear to us. And that's basically, you know, the tradition of getting together for holidays. And then my sisters and I and our families, we get together a lot. Like we just got back from our younger sister's house, Tammy's House. [00:49:17][17.8]

Kerry James Reed: [00:49:18] Yeah. She mentioned that to me. [00:49:19][0.7]

Vanessa Greene: [00:49:20] In North Carolina, for Memorial Day. That's something that we've kind of, like, made a tradition these past couple of years. We will do a girls trip somewhere. So we do it as a unit, total unit. And then, my sisters and I get together and do things. [00:49:38][18.4]

Kerry James Reed: [00:49:39] Fabulous. So, very briefly, if you could just tell me the names of all your siblings, just for the interview. [00:49:47][8.1]

Vanessa Greene: [00:49:48] Veronica Greene-Pace. Stanley Green. John Green. He's not a junior, he has a different middle name than my father did. Robin, R-O-B-I-N Greene-Schofield. And that's S-C-H-O-F-I-E-L-D. And Tammy green. [00:50:23][34.2]

Kerry James Reed: [00:50:28] And then where are you in relation, oldest to youngest? [00:50:30][2.1]

Vanessa Greene: [00:50:32] The fourth. Well, I say fourth. Yeah, I am the fourth oldest. Veronica. Stanley. John. Me. [00:50:39][7.0]

Kerry James Reed: [00:50:45] Ok. So, before we circle back to Colored Rosemont and the displacement and the development of the Adkins housing and things like that, I suppose we could talk a little bit about yourself and your life, if that's okay? [00:50:58][13.0]

Vanessa Greene: [00:50:59] Ok. I can always say I don't want to discuss whatever I don't want to? [00:51:03][4.2]

Kerry James Reed: [00:51:04] Absolutely. So, you mentioned, you know, going to school here in Alexandria. What schools did you go to? [00:51:11][7.6]

Vanessa Greene: [00:51:12] Charles Houston Elementary School. Parker-Gray Middle School. And George Washington [High School] for three years, and then T.C. Williams [High School] for one year.

And the only reason why I went to T.C. was because of the redistricting of the schools.
[00:51:34][22.6]

Kerry James Reed: [00:51:35] Yeah, that SK 22 plan or whatever it was. [00:51:39][3.8]

Vanessa Greene: [00:51:39] K6 to 2. Yes. [00:51:42][3.5]

Kerry James Reed: [00:51:46] That's it, that's it. What was it like to experience that redistricting?
[00:51:48][2.2]

Vanessa Greene: [00:51:51] I didn't like it. [00:51:51][0.7]

Kerry James Reed: [00:51:52] Yeah. [00:51:52][0.0]

Vanessa Greene: [00:51:53] Because of the fact I had bought my class ring that said GW high class of 1972. And just the fact that GW was in my blood, you know, that was the high school. I didn't want to go the T.C. Williams High School. And basically that was just it, you know. I couldn't understand why we had to do that, because the rationale was to fully integrate the schools. GW was fully integrated, TC was integrated. It may not have been as fully as GW, but they were integrated. Hammond was the only school that was not integrated like GW and certainly not like T.C. So, I guess they thought they were creating a balance. And for me, when everybody says, "oh, Remember the Titans?" I don't get excited about that movie, because to me it was Hollywood glitz. I'm not going to say that there was not some racial tension, but the biggest thing was territory. The students who had already been at T.C., they felt that we were invading their territory. And there's certain things that they I guess they felt that we, I guess GW folks and Hammond folks coming in, we were stepping on their toes, so to speak. My very best friend and I, we often talk about this in that we didn't see all that racial tension. I know that we weren't oblivious to it, but the way that the movie depicted it was like we were back down South somewhere. But it wasn't like that. It wasn't totally like that. I wasn't on a football team, so I don't know what they experienced. I can only speak of what I experienced as a student walking through the hallways. After a while I got adjusted because I sang in the choir at GW, and I did join the choir at T.C. I didn't do orchestra. I was tired of doing orchestra after that. That's one thing too I want to note, that all of us are musically inclined. We all played an instrument. We all sang in the church choir. All of us. And we sometimes sing, you know, just when we have our family gatherings as a unit. And what's so nice to see is that the generation under us, our kids, they sing as well. [00:54:38][165.2]

Kerry James Reed: [00:54:38] Oh. That's fabulous. [00:54:38][0.2]

Vanessa Greene: [00:54:39] Yeah. In fact, John's son is a pianist and a cellist. So, they all have picked up on the musical vibes. [00:54:48][9.5]

Kerry James Reed: [00:54:49] That's fabulous. That's absolutely fabulous. Did you play any musical instruments? [00:54:54][4.9]

Vanessa Greene: [00:54:55] Yes. [00:54:55][0.0]

Kerry James Reed: [00:54:55] What did you play? [00:54:56][0.3]

Vanessa Greene: [00:54:56] Viola. [00:54:56][0.0]

Kerry James Reed: [00:54:57] Viola? Very interesting. But you just did choir at GW and at T.C.?
[00:55:04][7.3]

Vanessa Greene: [00:55:05] I did. At GW I was involved in the orchestra as well as chorus.
[00:55:11][5.9]

Kerry James Reed: [00:55:16] Ok. So, I've heard a lot about, you know, 'Remember the Titans' and how it misrepresents or I guess overplays certain elements of that racial tension. And it gets me curious, as someone who maybe didn't live through the football experience but some of that, you know, was there at that time. What is it like to see, you know, Hollywood, I guess, misrepresent your experience? What does that feel like? [00:55:43][27.0]

Vanessa Greene: [00:55:45] I just look at it as anything else that Hollywood does. To gain, financial and entertainment purposes. The hype is what, you know, and even some of my peers who played football, they got caught up in that because it was like the spotlight was on them, you know, and all that. But, I don't know, I don't really think about it one way or the other now. [00:56:20][35.5]

Kerry James Reed: [00:56:27] While you were going to GW or T.C., did any of the teachers there ever talk about or teach Black history? [00:56:33][6.6]

Vanessa Greene: [00:56:35] Not while I was a student, no. [00:56:38][3.1]

Kerry James Reed: [00:56:48] So, I know that colored Rosemont has a very, you know, deep and rich history. We've talked about it a lot in our meetings and you know, on, on the website and everything like that. And it will be a very thorough breakdown. But I was hoping that briefly, could you describe the history of Colored Rosemont. [00:57:04][16.6]

Vanessa Greene: [00:57:06] Not really. Not really. And the reason why I say that, I don't want to do it an injustice. Veronica and Stanley and probably John as well, they could elaborate more so than I could, because there's almost a eight year age difference between Veronica and myself. And six between Stanley and myself and almost four between John and myself. So collectively, that's what, 18 years? Almost when you add it all together and their perspective would be different than my perspective. So I would prefer that you get that information from them. [00:57:53][47.8]

Kerry James Reed: [00:57:54] Not a problem at all. So, you mentioned to me, you know, previously when we talked that you went to Virginia State after you graduated. What did you study there? [00:58:07][13.4]

Vanessa Greene: [00:58:08] My first major was Elementary Education, and then I changed majors the second semester to Special Education. [00:58:15][6.7]

Kerry James Reed: [00:58:17] Why did you change? [00:58:17][0.5]

Vanessa Greene: [00:58:19] Strictly for, I had heard that special ed was the way to go. You know, there are a lot of elementary education teachers, but the real market was for special ed teachers. [00:58:33][14.8]

Kerry James Reed: [00:58:35] Did you know going into Virginia State that you wanted to be a teacher? [00:58:39][3.2]

Vanessa Greene: [00:58:39] Oh, yeah. I always wanted to be a teacher. In fact, I get compliments on my writing, my printing now. They say, "how come you write so neat like that?" I always wanted to write like my first and second grade teacher, Nellie Quander. I thought she had the most beautiful handwriting. And I always said that I wanted to be a school teacher so that I could write like Ms. Quander. [00:59:06][26.5]

Kerry James Reed: [00:59:06] Nellie Quander. [00:59:09][2.7]

Vanessa Greene: [00:59:09] Nellie B. Quander. [00:59:11][1.2]

Kerry James Reed: [00:59:12] Ok. Is that Quander, Q-U-A-N-D-E-R? [00:59:13][1.4]

Vanessa Greene: [00:59:15] Yes. [00:59:15][0.0]

Kerry James Reed: [00:59:16] Ok. So, was that experience with Miss Quander what drew you to teaching children then? Not so much like high school or anything. You always knew that you wanted to be with younger kids? [00:59:31][15.6]

Vanessa Greene: [00:59:31] I always wanted to be with children. [00:59:33][1.5]

Kerry James Reed: [00:59:33] Ok, absolutely. [00:59:34][0.7]

Vanessa Greene: [00:59:35] I didn't want to teach on the high school or even middle school level. I wanted to remain in the elementary level. And that's why I taught preschool for seven years. [00:59:46][11.7]

Kerry James Reed: [00:59:48] That's what I was about to ask about. Were you teaching preschool in the city? [00:59:50][2.3]

Vanessa Greene: [00:59:51] Yes. Not for the city schools, it was a private school. It was for Catholic Charities. It was called Cameron Valley Child Development Center. [01:00:01][10.0]

Kerry James Reed: [01:00:07] Where was that? [01:00:07][0.5]

Vanessa Greene: [01:00:08] It was located in the Old Blessed Sacrament School building on Braddock Road. And my group was the twos and threes. [01:00:22][13.8]

Kerry James Reed: [01:00:22] Oh, wow. [01:00:22][0.2]

Vanessa Greene: [01:00:24] Yeah. [01:00:24][0.0]

Kerry James Reed: [01:00:25] Oh, man. Thank you so much for doing that. [01:00:26][1.4]

Vanessa Greene: [01:00:27] Yes. [01:00:27][0.0]

Kerry James Reed: [01:00:28] Yeah. That's an age group, oh my word. [01:00:30][2.5]

Vanessa Greene: [01:00:31] Yes it is. It was really an enjoyable ride, but it wasn't, you know, the money wasn't there. And plus the program lost its funding. And so I went from one end of the spectrum to the next. And so I stepped into senior programming and I did that for the remainder of my career for 36 years. [01:00:54][22.7]

Kerry James Reed: [01:00:55] Ok. So that's quite an about-face to go from two and three year olds to elders in the community. What made you want to make that switch? [01:01:02][7.5]

Vanessa Greene: [01:01:04] Actually, the job came to me. Because I needed a job. And I'd always had a kindred spirit with older folks. And so I said, well I have I know how to program plan, you know, from doing program planning lesson plans, with the young folks. And I know about human growth and development and just kind of like, switching it over. And I'm not trying to be facetious or smart in terms of human growth and behavior, it's very similar pattern from the age group that I taught to, you know, the elders, particularly when I first started. There are folks who most of their career was being a domestic. And they didn't have an opportunity to learn how to read and write. So I started a reading program with the seniors in the Ladrey building [Ladrey Redevelopment Community]. That's where I started. [01:02:02][58.2]

Kerry James Reed: [01:02:03] I'm sorry, in the where? [01:02:04][0.9]

Vanessa Greene: [01:02:04] In the Ladrey building. And it was called the Reading Club. And that's when 7-Eleven did the Right to Read Initiative. And they were giving, grants to any program that was starting a reading program regardless of age. And so, I got help with writing the grant, and we were granted the grant, and I worked with the adult education, program through the city school system.

They provided me a tutor to come and work with the seniors. And I was very successful. And we did, at our closing program, we had testimonials from the seniors who participated, and it was very heartwarming. And, you know, you knew that it was a success. And to see people, you know, not being ashamed of being the age that they were and learning how to read for the first time. And then I did a lot of partnerships with the school system later on, as we went to the age of computers and technology. I worked with Dr. Sue Wilson at T.C. Williams and we did what we called Cyber Teens Cyber Seniors program, which paired the seniors with students who help our seniors who didn't have any experience with computers or very little experience navigating the web. And we ran that program for eight years, and it was very successful. And then I did a lot of intergenerational, well, that was one example of intergenerational programming with the cyber teens. And we had a 27 year history with Burgundy Farm School where we did a grandparent kind of program, where our seniors would be adoptive grandparents to fourth and fifth grade students from Burgundy Farms. [01:04:19][134.6]

Kerry James Reed: [01:04:19] That's terrific. [01:04:21][1.6]

Vanessa Greene: [01:04:21] Yeah. I didn't realize, you know, I'm not the type of person that boasts about what I did, but when I look back over everything that I did since I've been retired, I'm like, I did accomplish something. Sometimes you think you're doing all this and you don't really see the fruits of your labor. And since I've been retired, I've put a lot of thought into what I've been doing because I felt misplaced after I retired. Like, I didn't have a place somewhere, like lost. But I feel good about what I did, and I think I had a fruitful career. Did I have a fruitful financial career? No, because this kind of job, social service, job type or human service, that type of job, they don't really pay. You have to have a love for what you do to continue to do it for as long as I did it for the many years that I did it. [01:05:23][62.1]

Kerry James Reed: [01:05:24] Yeah, absolutely. That's fabulous. You mentioned earlier that a family tradition you have is to go to your father's church every fourth Sunday in August? [01:05:39][15.5]

Vanessa Greene: [01:05:40] In August, yes. [01:05:40][0.2]

Kerry James Reed: [01:05:41] What was the name of his church again or the church? [01:05:43][1.8]

Vanessa Greene: [01:05:43] Blue Run Baptist church. [01:05:45][1.4]

Kerry James Reed: [01:05:45] Blue Run Baptist Church. Where is that? [01:05:51][5.6]

Vanessa Greene: [01:05:52] In Barboursville, Virginia. [01:05:53][1.4]

Kerry James Reed: [01:06:00] So growing up what church did y'all go to? [01:06:03][3.2]

Vanessa Greene: [01:06:03] Veronica and I still go there today, Russell Temple CME [Christian Methodist Episcopal] church. [01:06:09][5.8]

Kerry James Reed: [01:06:10] Was that at the behest of your mother that you all went there? [01:06:25][14.9]

Vanessa Greene: [01:06:26] Yeah. [01:06:26][0.0]

Kerry James Reed: [01:06:27] Ok. What was it like going to church there? [01:06:37][10.5]

Vanessa Greene: [01:06:39] It was similar to, and that dynamic that Veronica always alludes to, is like you had the Continuum: home, school, church. So. It was just a continuum of your, you know, everyday activities or your family, your life. You know, a lot of families attended Russell Temple. We've lost a lot of folks. Again, you know, time brings about a change. And the founders and the stalwarts of the church, they are now gone, either through death or through moving on to, you know,

other churches or whatever. But, fond memories. Like I said, we sang in the choir from the little people, they would call the "little buds," the junior choir and then senior choir, gospel choir and all those. I'm really involved right now, I serve as a chairperson of the Social Justice and Human Concerns Ministry. I'm a stewardess, I'm a missionary, I'm one of the facilitators for the adult Sunday school class. [01:07:59][79.4]

Kerry James Reed: [01:08:02] That's fabulous. [01:08:02][0.2]

Vanessa Greene: [01:08:03] So I'm still, you know, heavily involved in ministry at Russell Temple. As well as Veronica. Veronica is also an instructor, and she's been a stewardess, a trustee. And now she also is one of the facilitators for the adult Sunday school class. [01:08:28][25.6]

Kerry James Reed: [01:08:29] That's fabulous. So have you always been so involved in church? [01:08:37][7.7]

Vanessa Greene: [01:08:41] Yeah. Even when I was, you know, younger. [01:08:42][1.6]

Kerry James Reed: [01:08:46] Because you mentioned that that continuum, sort of a triumvirate of home, school, and church. So how has how is your faith I guess affected, well, you've been a public servant clearly. But how was your how was your faith helped you in your life? [01:09:06][20.2]

Vanessa Greene: [01:09:10] With faith, it's a journey. When you start off, you're like a babe in Christ. And the hope is that you grow within your faith, you know, as you come to know Christ more and have a more intimate relationship with him. Sometimes I even think that, in fact, a former pastor of ours, she said, "Sister Greene, I think you need to be an exhorter, or you need to seriously consider being in the ministry." But I told her, "I have not heard that calling yet." Sometimes I think I hear it, but I don't feel that calling yet. But my understanding of the Bible is that he calls us. We don't call him, He calls us. And so, my faith is growing stronger and stronger. And I do believe that the experiences that I'm having now are Christ-led. And I try to follow that. And I do, you know, I like to have fun still. I'm crazy, you know, I like to have fun. I like to dance and stuff like that. But I think that makes the whole person. You just can't be one way, you know, you gotta have laughter. You gotta have a sense of humor. You have to be respectful. And if I were to describe me, and if you were to ask, "tell me about Vanessa?" I try to be a person who treats people the way that I want to be treated. And being very respectful. I think I'm mellowing with age because I used to be very, very curt in my talking, you know, to people. I try to season that a little better. And I actually think how what I say is going to be received. [01:11:22][132.4]

Kerry James Reed: [01:11:24] Absolutely. Do you a favorite song that you sing in the choir? [01:11:29][4.6]

Vanessa Greene: [01:11:31] Believe it or not, I don't sing in the choir anymore. I only sing on Missionary Sunday when the missionaries they have a choir. And that's only five times a year when it's Missionary Sunday. But one of my favorite hymns is, it's by JJ Harrison and Youthful Praise, it's called 'Grateful.' [01:11:51][20.4]

Kerry James Reed: [01:11:54] Absolutely. [01:11:54][0.0]

Vanessa Greene: [01:11:55] So, that would be my favorite hymn. And my favorite scripture is Proverbs 3: 5-6 [01:12:03][8.3]

Kerry James Reed: [01:12:08] What are those? [01:12:08][0.3]

Vanessa Greene: [01:12:10] Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not unto your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will direct your paths. [01:12:23][13.4]

Kerry James Reed: [01:12:26] Then, I'm sorry, you said you were the chairperson on the Commission for Social Justice and Human Concern? [01:12:30][4.1]

Vanessa Greene: [01:12:30] I'm the chairperson for that commission. Ok. Social justice and Human Concern. [01:12:34][4.0]

Kerry James Reed: [01:12:35] What does that commission do? [01:12:36][1.5]

Vanessa Greene: [01:12:37] It informs and enlightens the congregation on the latest trends in, social, civic, health, trends. We are very big on getting out the vote. When President Obama was running for office back in 2008, we partnered with the Urban League. It was a young people's, what was it called? But anyway, we did an old fashioned rally like they used to do back in the day of civil rights, about getting out the vote. And that was a very energizing moment. It was more than, I would venture to say 200 to 300 people in attendance and, you know, the momentum and everything. But basically, we do forums on different topics, and we have an upcoming one coming next Friday night, on just issues that affect all of us, but particularly the elderly. We have people coming to speak on different health topics that affect you, may affect you later in life, like diabetes, hypertension. We have Darryl Wesley from the Adult Day Services Center coming to talk about caregiving an, dementia. We have, Danita Green from Green Funeral Home talking about life insurances and what you need to know for end of life stuff. And it's a zoom, it's a virtual workshop. [01:14:15][98.3]

Kerry James Reed: [01:14:16] It sounds fabulous. [01:14:17][1.0]

Vanessa Greene: [01:14:18] Yeah. So that's it. Kerry, I'm participating in the Wii Bowling, tournament. [01:14:25][7.1]

Kerry James Reed: [01:14:26] Oh, really? [01:14:26][0.2]

Vanessa Greene: [01:14:27] Yeah. And I'm going to have to leave very shortly. [01:14:32][5.7]

Kerry James Reed: [01:14:33] Okay, so I guess we can move on to, well, as much as I would love to hear more about yourself, I guess we can move on to more Colored Rosemont focused questions then for the next ten minutes. Is that okay? [01:14:45][11.8]

Vanessa Greene: [01:14:45] I have five minutes. [01:14:47][1.3]

Kerry James Reed: [01:14:47] Five minutes. Ok. Oh my goodness, I'm so sorry. So I guess we can talk about Colored Rosemont today then. What is the neighborhood of Colored Rosemont look like today? [01:14:56][8.8]

Vanessa Greene: [01:14:57] It doesn't look like colored Rosemont. It just looks like a neighborhood in Alexandria that's undergoing redevelopment. When I saw that those houses were torn down and I'm going to give addresses: 1321, 1327, 1329 Wythe St, and then the whole block of 700 block of West St, it brought back a lot of memories. It was just like that part of my life is erased. And you know one thing you could always count on before they tore them down was that those houses were there. And now there's nothing there. And it's just like a part of the neighborhood. Well, the neighborhood is gone because I think our house and the one that sits at 635 N West St and a couple more, they're the only original structures of what Colored Rosemont used to look a lot. And I get very sad. [01:16:03][66.2]

Kerry James Reed: [01:16:04] Absolutely. [01:16:04][0.0]

Vanessa Greene: [01:16:07] Like I said, it's just erased. And I hate gentrification. [01:16:11][4.5]

Kerry James Reed: [01:16:12] Absolutely. That's what I was going to ask you about next. So, when you see the gentrification and the displacement that's still ongoing, both in the city and in Colored Rosemont especially, how does it make you feel? [01:16:27][14.5]

Vanessa Greene: [01:16:29] I just said it.[laughs] I hate it, I hate it. I know that change has to come, but what bothers me is the perception of the neighbors that move in, and they are white neighbors that move in. And I'll use our church, for example. They want to come and redirect the tenor or the flow of the neighborhood. I walked in here one Saturday and they were having some kind of community event, and there was one group that was talking about the Parker-Gray district. And when I looked in the room, it was nothing but a sea of white faces. How can you tell me about Parker-Gray and you know nothing about the history of Parker-Gray other than what you perceive to be. And I know other churches, particularly Shiloh Baptist, Reverend Lee Earle was a pastor at the time, and a lot of the neighbors, the white neighbors, would complain on Sunday, 'could they tone the music down?' And he told them, "we were here first. Y'all moved in." You know, this is church and this is how we praise the Lord, you know. And then ordinances that are developed after they move in, it's happened down with the Departmental Club on Gibbon St. That's a long standing club, and they have moved it so that they have to alter their hours of operation. Like if they have events in terms of they have to end by midnight. So those kind of things, you know, that bother me. When gentrification takes place, it just takes hold of and directs the tenor or the flow of the community. [01:18:31][122.6]

Kerry James Reed: [01:18:32] Absolutely. So along that same vein, what would you like people that are moving into Colored Rosemont to know about the history or just about the neighborhood in general? [01:18:42][10.1]

Vanessa Greene: [01:18:43] Just to know that when you move, and it's just like with anything, you can't just take over something. When you just move in, you get to know your surroundings first and then work together, hopefully to produce something that's going to be for the good of everybody. [01:19:02][19.4]

Kerry James Reed: [01:19:03] Yeah, absolutely. Well, I know you have to go bowl a 300 very soon. So I just have 1 or 2 closing questions if that's okay. Firstly, if there's one specific memory about colored Rosemont that you could hold on to forever, what would it be? [01:19:24][20.9]

Vanessa Greene: [01:19:27] The houses. The families. [01:19:30][3.2]

Kerry James Reed: [01:19:36] Absolutely. And then next, what do you want people to understand about colored Rosemont? [01:19:45][8.6]

Vanessa Greene: [01:19:46] That it existed. It was a thriving neighborhood. It wasn't just dilapidated housing. There were private homes and private homeowners, you know, home owners. And it was a neighborhood full of love and respect. [01:20:07][20.5]

Kerry James Reed: [01:20:07] Absolutely. And then what do you hope for the future of the area known as Colored Rosemont? [01:20:17][9.3]

Vanessa Greene: [01:20:19] That there will be some kind of memorial as to what used to be. That this is Colored Rosemont, was known as Colored Rosemont, and what that meant. [01:20:33][13.9]

Kerry James Reed: [01:20:35] Absolutely. Then lastly, if you could hold onto one memory forever, what would it be? Any memory. [01:20:43][8.3]

Vanessa Greene: [01:20:44] Any memory that relates to Colored Rosemont or just any memory?
[01:20:46][2.0]

Kerry James Reed: [01:20:48] It could relate to Colored Rosemont, it could be any memory.
[01:20:50][1.6]

Vanessa Greene: [01:20:50] Well, I have that now. Of my parents, my brother that's deceased. You know, one funny thing about my brother, I don't know why he didn't have nicknames for the three older ones, but he had nicknames for my two younger sisters and myself. Mine was 'Sam,' Robbin's was 'Charlie,' and Tammy's was 'Tom.' I don't know why he gave us those male nicknames, but I was Sam. And I was very close to my brother. In fact, I cried one so bad one day, he was stationed over at Camp David, and I cried so hard that my father had to take me over to see him. And once I saw him, I was okay. And he told me, you know, that I had to be a big girl and not to cry. So, I will always hold that because he gave it to me. [01:22:04][73.9]

Kerry James Reed: [01:22:05] Yeah. Most definitely. Well Ms. Vanessa, thank you so much for speaking with me today. It's been an absolute blessing to speak with you today. [01:22:12][7.5]

Vanessa Greene: [01:22:13] Thank you, Kerry. I've enjoyed it. I could have gone on. [01:22:17][3.6]

Kerry James Reed: [01:22:17] But we can always do more than one recording. Thank you so much.
[01:22:21][4.0]

Vanessa Greene: [01:22:21] Alright-y. [01:22:21][0.0]
[4519.8]