

Methodist University Community Oral History Project  
Methodist University  
Fayetteville, NC

**Brenda Joyce Jones**

Interview Conducted by  
Atlantis Johnson  
April 16th, 2017  
St. Pauls, NC

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1:37 - Last segregated class of 1969

Discussed early childhood memories, family dynamics, economic status

3:43 - Grew up “sheltered” without many friends of other races.

5:11 - Town itself was “divided” into white and black sides.

Had very few experiences with being discriminated against as a child.

6:32 - Not much racial tension between races in St. Pauls.

Was not really exposed to events regarding the Civil Rights movement in the deeper South.

11:43 - New Civil Rights didn’t really impact the town.

Did not stay in St. Pauls, moved to and lived in Virginia for about ten years after high school.

16:56 - Encountered more, but not much, diversity in college.

Interview of

**BRENDA JOYCE JONES**

Interviewed by

**ATLANTIS JOHNSON**

0:01

**JOHNSON:** This is Atlantis Johnson. It is April 16, 2017, and the time is 6:15 PM. Please state your name, and date of birth.

0:13

**JONES:** My name is Brenda Maynor Jones. I was born May 11th, 1951.

0:26

**JOHNSON:** Okay, thank you. Where did you grow up?

0:28

**JONES:** I grew up in-- I was born in Pinetops, NC, which is in Edgecombe County up near Wilson, NC. I was born in a house, I wasn't born in a hospital. I was so small, my mom said, that she had to hold me on a pillow. So, um--and I grew up in St. Pauls, NC.

0:59

**JOHNSON:** Okay. Where did you go to elementary/middle/high school?

1:03

**JONES:** I went to elementary school--and we didn't have kindergarten so I started with first grade, at Eastside school. So it's first through eighth, no middle school. So I started school, first grade, like I said, first through eighth, and then high school nine through twelve, graduated in 1969.

1:34

**JOHNSON:** Were your schools segregated [unintelligible]?

1:37

**JONES:** Uh, yes. I graduated in 1969 and my class was the last class to graduate from an all-black high school.

1:50

**JOHNSON:** At what age range would you define your childhood?

1:53

**JONES:** My childhood--uh, I'd say from 4 to 12.

1:58

**JOHNSON:** Okay. Do you remember your childhood, do you have a recollection of it?

2:03

**JONES:** Yes, I remember-- I think the earliest recollection of my childhood, I was four. I remember sitting in a little red rocker, I was sitting there -- I don't know whether I was getting punished or what, but I

remember sitting in the little rocker in the living room of my home. So. And, other, you know, from time-to-time other events, but that's the earliest..

2:34

**JOHNSON:** Okay. Did you have both of your parents growing up?

2:35

**JONES:** Yes, I had my mom and my dad.

2:38

**JOHNSON:** Okay. How many siblings did you grow up with?

2:42

**JONES:** I grew up with two brothers, I'm the oldest. So, there, my, um. The boy next to me, my brother next to me, was six years younger than me. My baby brother was 15 years younger than me. So, technically, I was-- when my younger brother was born, I started like babysitting him, I considered him mine. [laughs] Because, you know, such a wide age-range.

3:13

**JOHNSON:** Right, um. What would you define as your economic status growing up?

3:18

**JONES:** Um, my economic status, I'd say we were middle class, cause um. Yeah.

3:25

**JOHNSON:** What were your parent's jobs?

3:26

**JONES:** My parents was-- my mom was a teacher, she taught elementary school, my father worked at the VA [Veterans Affairs] hospital in Fayetteville.

3:34

**JOHNSON:** Okay. How old would you say you were when you realised that you were not white?

3:43

**JONES:** Um, I would say I was in high school. I lived a sheltered life, so it doesn't really-- I would go uptown, like go in town and see, you know, people, but it never dawned on me that I was one colour and they were another colour, um. Because, like I didn't go to a integrated high school, I mean I didn't go to an integrated school, so. I really didn't have any dealings, except maybe going to town and going to a grocery store or something--or, maybe going into a store and you saw white clerks. So I would say, um. Yeah.

4:26

**JOHNSON:** Um. Did you have any friends of other races growing up?

4:30

**JONES:** No I did not. Like I said, because, I didn't go to an integrated school, and so I didn't have any friends--and at the time the Hispanic race, they had not come to St. Pauls, so basically it was white and

black, and so. I did not have any dealings with any white children, and I didn't have any friends, except my own race.

5:03

**JOHNSON:** Was the town itself self-segregated, or was it more like, the way it was placed, like where you grew up, like black people on one side...

5:11

**JONES:** The way it was, um. There was a special street in our town called Wilkenson drive and we knew that there, that was white-only, you know, that's where the doctors and those people-- kind of people, you know they lived over there in that section of town, and north St. Pauls is where most of the Blacks lived. South side of town was where mostly the whites, you know, the whites lived and North side of town, you know, side my school was on, was where the Blacks mostly lived-- except, you know, the country [farmland] had both races, but I'm talking about here in town, like a two-mile radius, one side is white, the other side is black.

6:04

**JOHNSON:** Would you say that your race played a part in how well off, or not well off, you and your family were?

6:05

**JONES:** Hm. No. Because, like I said my mom was educated, she was a teacher, and my father was VA hospital, so.

6:22

**JOHNSON:** Okay. Before you were aware of any, like, country-wide things going on, what would you say was the racial environment in your town.

6:32

**JONES:** Um, we didn't have-- I never was aware of any racial tensions or racial issues going on. I know when I was in high school, um, there was a grill, we called it White House grill, down Highway 20 that only the white kids went to-- I heard them talking about it, but. But as far as having any problems, racial issues, not unless my-- my parents might have had, you know. Like I said I lived a sheltered life, I didn't have any problems, didn't have any issues. My parents might have come in contact with, you know, the issues, I didn't, so I don't know.

7:17

**JOHNSON:** Okay, you think that might've been a different case if you were in a larger city as opposed to a small town?

7:22

**JONES:** Yeah, cause in a small town, everybody knew everybody, so um. Like I said, everybody knew everybody so we didn't--like, we really didn't have any--I never knew of any problems with the races, and, like you said, probably would've been a different story if it was a bigger town where nobody-- everybody didn't know everybody, you know.

7:47

**JOHNSON:** Right. Do you have any recollection of like-- cause you were born in, like, the 50s, correct?

7:52

**JONES:** 1951.

7:53

**JOHNSON:** Right. So, when the Civil Rights movement was at its height, you would've been, like, fourteen or fifteen?

7:58

**JONES:** Uh. Seven? 61, 1961, I was like 10, 11, 12, 13, mm-hm.

8:10

**JOHNSON:** Did you ever, like, see any about that sort of thing on the news, or like hearing about this sorta thing?

8:16

**JONES:** Um. Not until--no. I remember when I was in--when I was-- we were going to Lumberton, North Carolina, 14 miles south of St. Pauls, my aunt was in--I think my grandfather was driving, and we had gone shopping, I guess, or gone to the doctor or something, my aunt. And we were coming back and we stopped at this, um. We stopped at this service station, we wanted to get some I guess water? Yeah, we wanted to get some water, and so we went up to the window, and the clerk, I guess, said, "white only." So that means they did not serve Black people. Um, so. Um. Yeah.

9:08

**JOHNSON:** Okay. Did that experience affect how you felt towards people of other races?

9:14

**JONES:** Not that I can remember. Um. Like I said, I remember, I still remember that, I think I was like in elementary school. Or maybe, I was like 11 or 12. I still remember that incident, but as far as affecting, no, I don't think so,

9:31

**JOHNSON:** Okay. So, did the issues, like, going on as a nation, like the Civil Rights movement and stuff, did that affect the town, or was the, St. Pauls, like in a bubble type of deal. Like, were you aware of that sorta thing going on, were you not like informed of Martin Luther King or anything like that?

9:58

**JONES:** Let's see, Martin Luther King came along--assassinated in, what, 1968?

10:03

**JOHNSON:** I believe so. [April 4th, 1968.]

10:05

**JONES:** Um. And the March on Washington was like 1964? [August 28th, 1963]. So I was born in '51, I don't think I was, mm-mm. I remember when, this not racial, doesn't have anything to do with race-- I remember when Kennedy was assassinated, that was in '63 [November 22nd, 1963] because I was, like, 12. Um, but as far as , um, race or things happening, um. I don't have any recollection of that--like I said,

I lived a sheltered life. we had to go to bed at, like 8 o'clock at night, I remember that very well. And so, we didn't have a lot of TV, so I don't--I know when I was in high school this is not racial, I remember a lot of hippies, and I remember flower children. I used to go up north to Philadelphia to visit my aunt, and I would see these hippies and these flower children on the street, and I would come back and say, "I wanna be a flower child, I wanna be a hippy," [both laugh] and I got this bag, and uh, and had a big, huge afro, and so that--that influenced me more than, you know, the racial part of the nation.

11:39

**JOHNSON:** Would you say that the Civil Rights Movement, did it have like an impact on the town at all?

11:43

**JONES:** Not that I'm aware of. It probably did, but it didn't-- like I said, it didn't, far as I'm concerned, didn't, uh-- I don't remember anything specifically that happened in our town.

12:00

**JOHNSON:** Were you, as a kid were you taught any of, like, the racial history of St. Pauls, or no?

12:07

**JONES:** No, no, don't remember talking about that. I remember in high school, I guess it was, you know, black history month? We would have to do, um reports, we'd have to make a book and we'd have to research all the black leaders of the nation--I remember doing a lot of research on the Black people, Black people that, you know, influenced the nation, what's going on--and we had to do like a booklet and put together a booklet, I remember doing that in high school.

12:46

**JOHNSON:** Um, would you say that, like--you went to a segregated school, correct?

12:49

**JONES:** Yes.

12:50

**JOHNSON:** So would you say that, like your school was affected, because, I've heard, like, that--like, black people didn't get as much funding as white people did, would you say that your, like--you noticed that or were aware of that?

13:03

**JONES:** Like I said, we--if it was like that, we didn't know, cause if you don't know what's on the other side of the tracks, then you won't feel no--whether you're privileged or not, I mean not underprivileged, so as far as we knew, the teachers were very good, we had all Black teachers, and they were very, very good, they were very strict, and so they made sure that you learned--um, there were no testing or nothing like that, except for the tests they gave you individually, so as far as us not--you know, feeling underprivileged, I don't think so. Um. We had band, we had basketball, like I said the teachers were black, and they really, really, really--they really--they were teachers that, um, you could tell they weren't there just for the money, they wanted to children to learn, and so. I don't think, I didn't feel like we were underprivileged or, you know. I don't--we might've been, but like I said if you don't know what's on the other side of the track as far as what's going on in the school--

14:29

**JOHNSON:** Right, you can't compare them.

14:30

**JONES:** You can't compare.

14:33

**JOHNSON:** Um, once you got older, did you stay where you grew up?

14:37

**JONES:** No, when I finished high school, I told my parents I wanted to go where I didn't know anybody for some reason. And so, I knew one girl, cause I--when I was growing up, I took piano lessons, uh, started in third grade. I used to take piano lessons with some man in Lumberton. So, when he--we would have concerts in the Spring, and so I met this girl, and she--I'd say she was a couple years older, and so she went to Virginia State University, so I said, "I wanna go to Virginia State University," and that was in Petersburg, Virginia, and then I said--cause I don't wanna go with any of my friends or anybody I know from my--that graduated with me, I didn't wanna go with them. So um. I went, uh--I left home when I graduated from high school, I left in the fall, and went to Virginia State for four years, graduated--well, four and a half, cause I was, I switched majors. I was a piano major, and then I figured, "what can I do with a piano major," you know, or, "I don't wanna be--I don't wanna teach music," so I switched to business, so I had to go an extra semester, so, um. I stayed in--I graduated from Petersburg--I mean, from Virginia State, then I went to, I got a job in Richmond, and so I stayed there maybe ten years. So.

16:15

**JOHNSON:** Okay. Um, did you notice a change in the racial environment as you got older, like. Once you moved, once you, like, went to college, cause. I'm sure, like, your college was integrated, correct?

16:26

**JONES:** My college?

16:27

**JOHNSON:** Was it integrated or segregated?

16:30

**JONES:** Uh, it was mostly segregated? We might have--well, no, we might have seen, like, I'd say ten white people. That's all, it was predominantly Black, Virginia State was a predominantly Black college. And so, maybe we saw ten people, ten white people on campus, but other than--you know, so, um.

16:53

**JOHNSON:** Did your racial environment change as you got older?

16:56

**JONES:** Um. Yeah, cause you know, when I--when I was growing up, my school was predominantly Black, when I went to college, it was still predominantly Black but at least we had, um--some white kids were going there, and we have white professors, a few--not a whole lot, a few white professors going there, and a couple from India, and the foreign professor. So I can--I would say that, yeah, it changed a little.

17:29

**JOHNSON:** Okay, was there any tension in that change, or.

17:32

**JONES:** No. When I went to school, um. No, not like it is now, with protests and all, you know. We mostly--our thing was block parties.

17:45

**JOHNSON:** [laughs] Really?

17:45

**JONES:** [laughs] We like, you know, gathering um--fraternities and sororities would have block parties they would perform, and so that was--and then we had the marching band, and that was, you know-- so as far being--protests and all this stuff, we didn't have that, we didn't have any of that for the four years--four and a half years I went there, we didn't have any of that.

18:11

**JOHNSON:** Okay. Is there anything else you'd like to say about your experiences growing up, or?

18:17

**JONES:** I think, um. I had a very good childhood, um. Compared to some of the kids in my town that were very, very--you could tell that they were underprivileged. But, um. To be honest with you, my family was one of the prominent families of St. Pauls. We were the Maynors. [laughs] And the Maynors were like--my grandfather was a minister, well-known in the community, well known in town. So, um. The Maynors were a prominent--prominent Black family in the community. So, I think um. Our childhoods were pretty special.

19:01

**JOHNSON:** Okay. Thank you so much.

19:03

**JONES:** Okay.