

Eula Branch Interview Summary

Interviewee: Eula Branch

Interviewers: Allison Silverman and Orson Lange

Interview Date: October 19, 2023

Location: Christopher Newport University, Newport News Virginia

Length: 1 audio file, MP3 Format, 44:17

INTERVIEWEE: Eula Branch was born in Edgecomb County, North Carolina. She moved to Newport News in 1966, at which time she began attending Carver Elementary School. She later attended Carver High School, which she loved. Shortly before her senior year, however, she was reassigned to Warwick High School as part of the court-ordered bussing program that the city had implemented to desegregate local schools. She spent one year at Warwick, graduating in 1972. After high school, attended what was then Thomas Nelson Community College. She pursued a career in customer service and eventually was in positions of management. During that period, she also married and had children and, later, grandchildren, who attended local schools.

INTERVIEWERS: Allison Silverman and Orson Lange are students at Christopher Newport University located in Newport News, Virginia. This interview is part of the Hampton Roads Oral History Project, led by Dr. Laura Puaca of the university's history department.

INTERVIEW DESCRIPTION: This interview was conducted on the campus of Christopher Newport University. Branch shared very fond memories of Carver High School, which she attended with other neighborhood friends. Consequently, she was devastated to learn about the court-ordered bussing plan that sent her to Warwick High School and ultimately shut down Carver High School. Although she enjoyed some aspects of Warwick, such as being able to continue participating in DECA, or the Distributive Education Clubs of America, her overall experience at her new school was marked by a profound sense of loss. She especially missed her friend group from Carver, which was largely split up and sent to different schools. She also missed being able to complete senior year milestones with her Carver classmates, or what she and others called "The Class That Never Was." After graduation, she and other students previously slated to graduate Carver in 1972 held numerous reunions and continued to share a class cohesion. She even has "Carver" on her class ring, although her diploma says "Warwick." Branch also described some points of tension between White and Black students at Warwick, whose mascot had historically been the "Farmers." The use of a plow—a symbol that invoked slavery in the eyes of many Black students—became a particular point of contention that resulted in a riot and the plow's removal. When asked about what she considered unfinished business of the civil rights movement, Branch remarked about the ongoing struggle and even increased resistance to civil rights in recent years.

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START OF INTERVIEW

Orson Lange: So, this is Orson Lange, and my partner–

Allison Silverman: Allison Silverman.

OL: Today is October 19th, 2023. We are interviewing Mrs. Eula Branch. Alright, this interview is being carried out as part of the Hampton Roads Oral History Project at Christopher Newport University. Good afternoon, Mrs. Branch, So we're taking–

Eula Branch: Good afternoon.

OL: Afternoon, right! [laughter] We are taking what's called a "life history approach" and I'd like to begin our interview with a few questions about your childhood, where you grew up, and, you know, your life before everything. So, where were you born?

EB: I was born in Edgecomb County, North Carolina.

OL: And when?

EB: And I moved here in April of 1966, when I started going to school at Carver Elementary.

OL: Okay, so what brought you and your family over to Virginia?

EB: My father came here for work.

OL: Yeah. Can you just, like, tell me a little bit, like, about the community you grew up in in North Carolina then like kind of just progressing when you came to Virginia?

EB: Okay, in North Carolina was more rural area. You know, houses very far apart. And when we came here to Newport News, Virginia, we lived in the old Newsome Park, where we had lots of friends, kids playing around, and life was good. You know, everybody loved one another and was treating everybody good. And I came here and we had the opportunity to go to Carver Elementary or to go to Huntington. So everybody said, "Let's go to Carver! Please go to Carver!" So, people at Carver seem to be more friendlier in the neighborhood where we lived. Some people in Newsome Park went to Huntington, some went to Carver. So the Carver kids seemed to be nicer kids. That was the way we felt it, like as a child. So, we ended up going to Carver and I loved going to Carver. It was an exciting school. The teachers were good, they cared about us, they cared about our futures. And they did what they needed to do to make sure we stayed on track.

OL: And, where were like, racial relations like back then, within the community that you grew up in?

EB: It was all Black. School, all Black. Teachers, all Black.

OL: Yeah

EB: Mm-hmm, yeah.

OL: Like, did you like, comparing yourself [the] all-Black school compared to the all-White school, was there any like underfunding that you had to deal with back then? Like bad textbooks at all?

EB: We felt like our textbooks were older textbooks compared to the White schools.

We had the used books or books that were at a lower level than at the White schools.

OL: Was that like--? Did you guys ever, like, feel like, I guess jealous, about that at all? Like, I mean that's pretty rough, right?

EB: Well, at the time, in elementary school, as a young person of that age, your parents dealt with that type of stuff. The kids, you know, we did what we were told and read the books we were given. We really didn't—. At that age, [in the] sixth grade, you're not really mindful of the level of education that you're getting compared to somebody else. But once we got into high school then we got to see, you know, "Hey, it's a little different here." You know. Yeah. So then, therefore, [we] felt discriminated against, you know, [and came to believe] they are getting a better education than I'm getting, you know?

OL: [to AS] Do you want to go on the transition?

AS: Yeah. So next we'd like to hear about some of your experiences attending some of the city's segregated schools before turning into integration. Well, I guess you've already answered this but we were going to ask did you attend any elementary schools in Newport News and which ones.

EB: [Yes.] Carver Elementary. Everybody was friendly, you know. You had some bullies, here and there. But overall, everybody was very nice and helpful.

OL: And did you have, like, a favorite subject at all?

EB: English, English.

OL: English?

EB: English was my favorite subject. [laughter] Yes.

OL: And like teachers, I guess maybe English teachers stood out to you?

EB: Mrs. Roberts was a good teacher.

OL: Yeah, what did she do though?

EB: She was an English teacher [who made sure you got it correct].

OL: And so when you were in Carver, were you like—?

EB: That was elementary. What we were just talking about, elementary [school].

OL: Oh yeah. Sorry, yeah elementary. Were there, like, any clubs that you were in?

EB: No clubs. I was in no clubs in the elementary school. When I got into high school, I was in the DECA [program].

OL: Okay. And like how is it making friends back then? Was it, like, easy?

EB: It was easy to make friends because a lot of the people that went to school with you were the people that lived in your neighborhood. So you had friends at home and those friends, you went to school with them.

OL: Okay yeah. And, you know, yeah-. I guess this question was already asked, but did you notice back then, like, the difference between the Black and the White schools? I guess you already said a little bit about that. But do you have any more to say?

EB: At the elementary level? You really didn't-. We really didn't notice any difference in it. But we wanted to stay with the all-Black School. That was what we preferred. And we then, you know, you learned how to go to the library, and you learn how to research stuff and get that level of education up, you know, trying to get to where the others [were]. So you know you learned those things as you got older. You know, [learned] how to bring yourself up to a different level, okay.

AS: Okay, so we've heard a little bit about your elementary school experience. Could you tell us about your overall experience at Carver High School?

EB: My overall experience at Carver High School was awesome. You know, I saw myself moving up, doing different things. I was in the DECA club. We had competitions up in Roanoke. I was selected to go to Roanoke twice for competitions to help out with the competitions that we [participated in] . A lot of competitions we won and a lot of competitions we lost. But it was fun

and it was getting me prepared for my future. It was getting me ready for customer service, which is what I did end up doing. I learned a lot about customer service, how to treat my customers, how to take care of disgruntled customers—and not knowing, at that time that I was taking the DECA, that that would be the line of work that I would end up doing for twenty years. So when I retired, I retired as a manager in customer service, so it prepared me for my future. Okay, so I had a lot of good experiences there. My teachers were very helpful at Carver.

AS: Okay, so we asked you about if any teachers stood out in elementary school. Did you have any teachers that stood out in Carver High School?

EB: At Carver High School, I had Miss Williams. She was my English teacher. She was awesome. She was a very, very strict teacher and she would make sure that when you wrote an essay, it had to be top notch. Oh, God, not the average English. It was advanced. I took advanced English. So she was my advanced English teacher. She taught me a lot. And lo and behold, in the management level that I ended up working in, I had to supervise people. And they had to [write] performance reviews for their associates. And all of the [skills] that I had learned through the advanced English, all of that stuff came back. I ended up teaching [my supervisors how to properly write performance reviews using complete sentences]. Some people, I—. You know, you think when you get old and you've worked on a job for ten years, you'd think you can write a complete sentence. But [it was a struggle for some] and I was floored by that. But, you know, I guess some people go to school and pay attention, others don't. When they get out in the work world, they're trying to get themselves at the level where they should [be]. But the things that I learned at Carver under Miss Williams ended up paying off. And my supervisors would always tell me, "Miss Eula, you should have been a teacher." But it was the [skills] that I learned at Carver that made me successful as a manager for over twenty years.

AS: Wow. That's amazing.

OL: Yeah. And how long—. What years were you at Carver from?

EB: I was at Carver in 1966, in the sixth grade, and I went all the way to '71, to the eleventh grade. And the eleventh grade was where they decided that we had to [go to] desegregated schools.

OL: Right. And that's kind of—

EB: And that's when it all just came—crashing down because it was so hurtful, because that was my last year. You know, I was looking forward to graduating from Carver and being with my fellow classmates that I had been going to school with for years. And now, all of a sudden, [I had] to go to a school with other kids from Huntington, kids [from] Newport News High, the Ferguson kids, and [etc.]—. It was just really hard. It was hard because the law said we had to desegregate but we, in our hearts, we didn't want to. We wanted to stay at our regular schools. I wanted to graduate from Carver because Carver was what I knew. You know, when I ended up going to Warwick, some of my friends from Carver went to Warwick. But it was just so different. It was like, you know, I went from having all Black teachers to having all White teachers. The teachers were nice, but the vibes that you got, you know, you weren't getting the vibes that you were used to getting from your Black teachers. It was really hard. I never spent a full day at Warwick. I had English class, a DECA class and my government class. And when I finished my three classes I would get on the bus and I would go to work. I never—. It never felt like home for me, you know? It just didn't have the feel that Carver had. And then the kids were—. Well, all of us were upset about having to leave our schools, and it was a lot of uproar going on. Kids were fighting, and it was a lot of stuff going on and [we] were trying to concentrate on what [we] were trying to do. It was really hard for us.

OL: And so you were in the eleventh grade at Carver and then—? When you're entering your twelfth grade, then you got moved into Warwick.

EB: [Yes,] to Warwick High School.

OL: Wow. And so—. And you said a few friends came with you. Did you, like, find any, like, comfort, hanging out with them or were these just, like, kind of acquaintances that you had?

EB: The people that I was hanging around with were people that lived in my neighborhood because, they [were] bussed [too]. We went to schools based on where we lived. So it was mainly the people that, in my neighborhood, at that particular time, [where] we lived—. We [lived on] off Sixteenth Street, we had bought a home. And so, I went to school with my neighborhood kids, and those were the friends that I had in the neighborhood. So they were my friends at school [as well.]

OL: And so how did like, I guess, the friends that you had that weren't in the neighborhood but were at Carver with you, how did they, like, feel about the whole situation? Like you must have been so sad like—?

EB: Well, we were because most of my friends went to Ferguson and Menchville, you know. Only [a few] people that I knew at Carver went to Warwick [and they were] the people in my neighborhood. Everybody else was at Menchville and Ferguson. We were just split up so much, you know. And you never got to see those friends again because, you know, times were different back then. Those days, you walked places [where] people lived—. You knew somebody live ten miles from you, you might talk to them on the phone every now and then. But you didn't get a chance to see them because transportation wasn't as easily accessible then as it is now, you know, because we were young and you know your parents would let you have a car on the

weekend but you could only keep the car out for so many hours. So it was really hard because [I] missed [my] friends.

OL: And I guess with that, like, with that bussing process that was going on—. Like, how far away was Warwick from your place?

EB: We lived on Sixteenth Street, and I would say that Warwick is at least ten miles.

OL: Ten miles?

EB: At least ten miles, probably more. Let me see, downtown Newport News on Sixteenth Street to Warwick High School, it's got to be at least ten miles. Up to twelve miles, I would think. Maybe. I'm guessing.

OL: Yeah. How long would that take by, like, taking the bus?

EB: You know, back then, the kids on the bus [were] having a good time, we didn't pay time any attention. [laughter] You know, you're on the bus, you studying for a test or something, you didn't pay how long it took you to get to the school. Plus the bus was stopping at the different stops, picking up other kids. So you weren't paying attention to how long it took. But I would think, now, if I went down—. On Sixteenth Street, it'd probably take me twenty minutes, probably to get from Sixteenth Street to Warwick. Somewhere in that ballpark, between fifteen to twenty minutes, just straight driving. That's how long it would probably take. But stopping? You know, it [takes] longer than that.

OL: And so like with that—. So what was the first day like at Warwick? So you already got the news.

EB: Scary. It was scary because, you know, you're in a different environment. Like I said, I went from having all Black teachers to having all White teachers. I didn't know where I was. You know, I got to learn how to get from one class to another, where at Carver I knew exactly where

everything was because I'd been there for a while. It was just frightening. You know, where you were [originally] in an environment where it was just all Black and all of a sudden you look around and you might have—. I really can't say it was half and half.

OL: Yeah. What was that ratio like?

EB: I think it was probably less Black than it was White, probably. I'm thinking based on where we lived.

OL: And so did you—. Were you able to, like, form relationships with like White students?

EB: Yeah, I did end up, you know, being able to conversate. But, as far as being buddy buddy with people? No. I had acquaintances.

OL: Acquaintances.

EB: I haven't—. There is nobody I went to school with that I have contacted in the last fifty years. No, nobody, [I] know that wasn't already going to Carver or somebody in the neighborhood.

OL: And was there, like, any like discrimination at all that you faced in Warwick or—?

EB: I can't really—. Like I said, the vibe was different.

OL: Right

EB: It was more like kind of you were on your own, you know? First of all, I didn't want to be there. They didn't want me there. So you know, I'm just trying to graduate. I'm trying to get my A's and my B's and my C's. And I'm trying to graduate because I'm already hurt because I'm not going to graduate from my school. You know, you're going to a school where they're saying you are a Warwick Farmer. Who wants to be called a farmer? You know? And there was a big thing about that. I mean, it was a big uprising about being a Warwick Farmer. And it was a riot.

OL: No kidding.

EB: Yeah. It was a riot going on at the school because they had a plow out in front of the school. And you know Black people, going back to slavery, we've seen enough plows. So they ended up pulling that up out of the ground.

OL: And then the White students called you like a farmer and whatnot?

EB: No. Like now it's called the Warwick Raiders? It was called the Warwick Farmers then.

OL: Oh, okay.

EB: And we didn't like that. We didn't like that at all. So it was a riot at school and protest to remove the plow and they wouldn't remove it. So some of the kids decided, "Hey, well, y'all won't remove it, we'll remove it." So that's what happened. So now that's why Warwick is called the Warwick Raiders.

OL: Okay, wow. Okay, that's cool. Did you take part in that?

EB: No way. My father wouldn't go for that. [laughter]I'd have to support [the cause] in another way. Yeah.

AS: Did you know anyone who did?

EB: After the fact, yeah, I did know some kids that participated. But while it was going on, I went home. People were fighting. It was not nice. It was scary. It was really scary. Some of the Blacks were just as afraid as the Whites because there was so much going on at that time.

OL: And so, you know, you talked about, like, your favorite teachers and elementary and then Carver. And then you described your relationships with, like, you know, the White students. Was there, like within Warwick, were there any standout teachers that you like? Anybody in the English department?

EB: I'm trying to remember my DECA [teacher's name]. [It was Fred Joseph Gebron] He was a nice teacher. He was a very young teacher. He was the youngest teacher I had ever had

throughout my whole school experience. He was probably fresh out of college, my DECA teacher.

OL: Yeah. And were you, like, in any clubs in Warwick?

EB: Other than the DECA? [No,] I was only in the DECA club.

OL: Okay and what was the DECA club?

EB: Distributive Education [Clubs] of America. It was where [we] learn a trade and they [taught us] how to interview, how to dress for interviews, how to act when you [went] on an interview. They taught merchandising [and] all the skills [needed to maintain] a job: like customer service and marketing. Anybody that wanted to work in those fields, that was what they taught [us] And what [we] would do is go to school for four hours and go to work for four hours. So that was what I did. That's how I ended up in the customer service field.

AS: Was there like a difference that you noticed between DECA at Carver and DECA at Warwick?

EB: It was basically the same program. The only difference was it was Black and White at Warwick where, at Carver, it was all Black. That was about the difference. Even when I went to Roanoke to the contest, that was all it was. To me, I didn't see any difference in it. The only difference I saw when we went to the contest, I guess by me coming from a Black school, going to a more White school, it would seem like we had more White winners than we did Blacks. That was the only thing I could say I [saw] the difference in.

OL: Okay. Yeah. And I guess like-. You know, was it a long year at Warwick? Like that, that one year you spent at Warwick? Was it like-? Did it feel like eternity?

EB: Yes, it did. It felt like forever because, you know, it just [seemed] so [spiteful] that here [I am] in [my] twelfth grade year, wanting to graduate from one school and being made to graduate from another one.

OL: Right.

EB: And, it was very hard and strenuous. And I think everybody had a hard time with it.

OL: Did your family have a hard time with it, like your parents?

EB: Well, our parents, they tried to fight it. They wanted us to stay at the schools that we were going to. But the government said, "Hey, this is what's going to happen and this is what you have to do." So that's what we had to do.

OL: And what was like, I guess the politics like in that area? Like was politics discussed at all, or back then like—?

EB: Well, back then, they didn't really do a lot of politicking back then in those days. You know everybody, I guess—. My father wasn't too much into politics.

OL: Okay. Yeah. And so I guess like with the year being, like, so slow and whatnot, did like the attitudes of the White students—. Did they, like, change at all over that year?

EB: Well, they seemed better. As time went on, we all got better with each other because we had no other choice. We were forced to do this and we had no other choice. So, you [had] to make it or break it. So we make it.

OL: So did the—. Did the school have any like events or what not happening to try and like, you know, get all the students to hang out together?

EB: I don't remember us having any events. I don't even remember. [I am really not sure but] we did have our prom. We had our prom like we normally would, and it turned out fine. We had our football games and our basketball games and things like that we normally would have. You

know, we just had to do what we had to do. And right now, you know, kids are used to it. But for that first year for us, we miss the old way. You know, it's hard [when] people don't do change well as grown-ups. And so you know, it was hard for children to do change. So, that's, I think, that's why it was so hard because we were children, you know. As a grown up, you know that you take one day at a time and you go with change [when necessary]. But, as a child, it was harder for us, [we had to slowly accept the change]

AS: So after graduating from Warwick, did the school continue to become more diversified or was there a noticeable case of White flight from the high school as school choice became more prominent?

EB: You know what? I have to be honest with you. After I graduated from Warrick, I never put my foot back in Warwick until my grandkids went to Warwick. [laughter] I think I went there one time to do some business, to get something related to my diploma. And other than that I had never put my foot in Warwick High School from the day I walked out of there until my grandkids went there and I would go there for their programs.

OL: You didn't want anything to do with Warwick after?

EB: No. [Not really.] You know, I did what I had to do. Even on my graduation ring, it said Carver.

OL: Oh really?

AS: Oh wow.

EB: My graduation ring said Carver because they gave us the opportunity to say, "Hey, you can have Carver on your diploma and you can have your ring say Carver." So I had my ring say Carver. But I knew that Warwick being on my diploma was going to take me further than having Carver on it. So I put Warwick on my diploma.

OL: And like so—. I know you said like you know, you weren't in any like the events until, like your grandkids went to Carver. Went to Warwick, sorry. Were there, like any reunions of Warwick?

EB: They have had reunions, but I've never been to any because—. I guess by [my family moving from Newport News to Hampton, contact was lost.] When I was at Warwick, I lived on Sixteenth Street And then when I left Sixteenth Street, I got my own place and then I got married. So the connection [was lost again,] you know. I heard about reunions after the fact, but I've never been to any of the reunions. But if I did hear of one ahead of time, I think I would go.

OL: Okay. What was that—? Is that the same thing with, like, Carver as well?

EB: Oh, we've been doing our reunions.

OL: Oh, no kidding.

EB: We do our reunions. We started with our tenth year reunion. We [do] one every five years.

OL: And you go to each one?

EB: And I've been to every last reunion that we've had. And I'm on the committee for the reunions.

OL: That's very nice. And so how is, like, I guess the people like—. Do you talk to the Carver students at all about your experience in Warwick? Like, you know, like you joke with them about it?

EB: We did years ago, but it happened so long ago now. You know, sometimes [when] we get together [and] somebody might mention something, "You remember when this happened? You remember when that happened?" We go, "Oh, yeah, I remember. Yeah, that was kind of rough there. That was—. Girl I was scared." You know, talking about when they had the riots at the school because, [I mean,] they had a big thing going on. The big riot started at Menchville and

then it went from Menchville and came on down Warwick Boulevard to Ferguson and then it was at Warwick. I'll never forget it. Like I said, it was frightening.

OL: Did you feel like you're like judged for going to like a high school [with more resources], like compared to Carver? Like did the Carver kids ever hold any like resentment about that? Like, "Oh, why are you, like, lucky enough to go to Warwick?" Like, did you ever—

EB: No, never. No. Talking to the people that had graduated from Carver prior to us?

OL: Yeah, sort of.

EB: No, no, we didn't. We never got any of that because they knew the choice was not ours. They knew that it was a law that we had to go to those other schools because prior to that, you know, we had "freedom of choice." We could go to any school we wanted to go to, prior to that. And we chose to go to Carver. And that's where we went. Started out going to school when we moved here and we liked the people and we loved the school. We love the teachers. So that's why we wanted to graduate from [Carver]. But it didn't work out that way.

OL: And so with that, like—. Since you said, you know, you wanted to be with your own people—

.

EB: [Yes.]

OL: You know, with school choice going on. And you know that's kind of like, you know, a little bit, like segregation going on—

EB: Right.

OL: Where you know, you know, Blacks have their own school and Whites have their own school.

EB: Right.

OL: Was there like any effect of that at all on you? Like with segregation, is there any, like, long term effects that you faced, I guess?

EB: The only thing that bothered me was the fact that it was my last year of high school. And I wish—. I knew it had to happen to somebody. I just wish that I would have been able to have graduated from Carver, you know. And in my bones, I still feel like I graduated from Carver because over the years, like I said, we've done all of our reunions. We call ourselves "The Class that Never Was." We've done all our reunions and you know, we have a nice turn-out when we do [them]. But people are getting older now. [You do things different]. Huntington—was our rival school. We've had a reunion with them. One year, we, Carver and Huntington, we mixed. We came together and did one big reunion for the Huntington and the Carver "Class of '7[2] That Never Was."

OL: Do you feel like, you're like, robbed?

EB: Yeah.

OL: I guess, in the last year, like a senior year?

EB: Yeah, that's exactly what we felt like. It was so hurtful. It was just like—. It would [had] been a lot more fun if we had been able to have graduated from our school.

OL: And you found out about the whole desegregation process. I guess it was like a letter came in the mail?

EB: Yeah, I'm trying to remember. It was on the news and I'm quite sure that they sent some kind of letter to the house for my parents to say, "This is what's going to happen. And you're going to have to do it."

OL: Oh, did your heart like drop?

EB: Oh God, [I] cried. Well, you know, like I said, it was hurtful. [I] cried because [I] did not want to leave [my] school. [I] wanted to stay at [my] respective school.

OL: And with that, like, the desegregation of, like, the schooling system and whatnot, did that have a negative effect on you in some ways? Like, you know, being in this almost unknown-like type of place where you're in this new place and—.

EB: Yeah, because I felt like a fish out of water. I really did. I felt like a fish out of water and you're looking around and, you know, you don't want to be here. They're looking at you and they really don't want you here. And you can tell by the way they're looking and the vibe, you know, [the deal].

OL: Were they, like, staring at you?

EB: No, not staring. Just the little smirks, and you know—. It wasn't nice, it wasn't good. But, as like I said, it started out one way and it, as it went on, we learned to tolerate each other. I'll put it like [this]. We tolerated each other because we had no other choice.

OL: And so did your kids—? Where did your kids—I guess moving on from that, did you go to college at all?

EB: Yes, I went to Thomas Nelson.

OL: Okay. And I guess what was Thomas Nelson like? Was that sort of similar to Warwick?

EB: I didn't go to Thomas Nelson right out of high school. I'd probably been married about [one] year before I went to school. But see, I was in the workforce, so all of this, all of that separation stuff, and Black and White, it doesn't matter. [I] just [went] to work. And I had been used to working so I was used to being around the other ethnic groups.

AS: So—

EB: [phone rings] Whoopsie, sorry.

OL: Oh, you're okay.

AS: No worries.

EB: Whew, whew.

AS: What was it like? Trying to relate to your children who grew up in a formally desegregated society when you grew up in a segregated one?

EB: We really never discussed it, really, other than telling them the fact about how painful it was that we started out in all-Black school and, then, the last year we had to desegregate and go in and go in with the White kids because that's what the law said. And there was a lot of things that we had to get used to. You know, a lot of things happened once we desegregated. Okay: the upbringing of a Black family is so different from the upbringing of a White family. Back then, if your parents told you it was raining and you looked out and you saw the sun shining? [In your mind,] it was raining [laughter] That's the way it was. And so our kids ended up picking up a lot of the habits of the White kids where, in the Black families [talking back, using] drugs and stuff like that, that was a no-no. Your parents said, "Don't touch drugs," you didn't mess with drugs. But going into this mix, then they picked up the habits of doing the other stuff and—. That's what I tried to let my kids see, you know? You cannot pick up the habits. You stay with what you learn at home. If your parents tell you, "Don't touch drugs," then you don't touch drugs. When I tell people that I've never smoked a marijuana, they don't believe me. They look at me like, "How old are you?" My father and my mother said, "Don't do this." We were straight and narrow. And when we mixed in with the others, we picked up a lot of other habits. Not me, per se, but our race did. I put it like that and that was what I talked to my children about.

OL: Okay. And I guess looking at, like, the civil rights movement, you know, when you were, like, living through it back then. And then like, you know, when you went to high school, it was,

you know, the formal part of the civil rights movement in some ways was kind of like over, in some ways. You know, busing began. The Civil Rights Act, Voting Rights Act, you know, were already passed. Did they ever teach about that in, like, high school at all? Like talk about, like, the major figures? Like Martin Luther King?

EB: We talked about Martin Luther King, but we never talked about the Black Power movement. We never talked about any of that. But we did talk about Martin Luther King and his civil rights movement and what he did [to improve civil rights]. We did learn about that. Well, we were taught that at home, [and] we did learn about that in school. Talking about the Black Power movement and all that, we learned nothing about that in school.

OL: Did you, like, ever find yourself agreeing? With like the Black Power movement?

EB: I never liked anything dealing with violence [or could get violent]. I like right and [not the] wrong. I don't like [anything] that deals with violence. If it's something violent, no, I'm not involved with that.

OL: Okay. Yeah, absolutely. I mean, yeah. With like the civil rights, you know, movement going on, with segregation, like, were you ever, like, angry at all about it? Like, you know, you felt like you were being robbed of a, you know, a decent life where, like, you know, the White people had, like, upper standards of living in some ways?

EB: What I found that—. You and I could be equal, but you always had a footing above me because you were White. And I found that to be true even on my job back in the '70s. You know, you could still see those things like that happening and that's where, you know, you could see the difference. You could see the difference that being White, hey. But when you're Black, you got to be better. You got to be twice as good. So that's why, even when I got into management, I was strictly by the book because I had to be. And I had to know the book. When [people came]

to me and ask[ed] me a question, I had to be able to tell it to [them] and [they would] say, “Well, it is right?” And [when they] look in the book, “Oh, that chick’s by the book, she know her stuff.”

OL: And I guess like looking back at like desegregation of the school system, do you think that, like, played a big role in like, helping, I guess Virginia become more desegregated in some ways? Like, do you think that like, it helped people with attitudes and like learning about, you know, other people’s races and whatnot? Like you think, you know, that was like, helpful?

EB: The movement itself was helpful?

OL: Or I guess—. What role do you think that school desegregation played in the broader civil rights movement?

EB: I think what it did, it gave us the opportunity to learn more about each other because, where before, you only knew what someone told you. Or, you know, “all White people are bad.” You know? I’m just saying I’ve never been told this, but maybe somebody will say “all White people are bad.” But then when you get to be around White people, White people are just like Black people. You got good and bad in both races, you know. And you get to learn that people are different. You got good and bad. Some are nice and some are not nice, you know. You got to learn about the true thing about people, the true feelings of people, you know, and how we treat one another. And we all, we’re all human. We all bleed red. You know, there is no difference. You know, it’s just the colors of our skin and one person think that they are more superior than the other. And that’s all in the old upbringing. That’s all [they used to teach.] [We] teach kids now that you can be anything you want to be, but you got to go out there and you [go] to work for it. You’ve got to do it honestly. Go out there and work for it. You can be anything you want to be in this world.

OL: And I guess like with that, what do you think is the most important legacy [or] crowning achievement, of the civil rights movement back then? Like do you think there's, like, something that's just like the most important aspect of the civil rights movement? Is, like, school busing part of that or—?

EB: I think the main thing of it is saying we're all equal. That was the main thing that came out of that, that we are all equal. Nobody is better than anybody else, regardless of the color of your skin. And believe in doing the right thing. Always believe in doing the right thing for the right situation.

OL: And did you ever, like, find yourself, like, attending, like any protests about, like, civil rights at all?

EB: Well, see when the civil rights movement first came up, I was a kid. And even when the Black Power stuff came out, I was still [young]. I was like maybe eleven or twelve during that time. So, like I said, my father say, "You do this. This is what you going to do. You not going out there and get in [any] trouble." And if it's something peaceful? He would back it. But if this was something where something could actually happen and go a bad way, we were not going to be involved in that.

AS: What do you regard as the unfinished legacies or work of the civil rights movement?

EB: You said the unfinished?

AS: Yes.

EB: It seems like all of the work that was done back in the '60s and '70s—. It just seemed like people have gotten so mean and hateful now and that they are trying to go back with it. And I don't know what we can do to let them see that what was done then—.. It looks like they're trying to do a 360 and go backwards, is what I see. That's what I see, overall, in the world. I know it

looks like—. That's the way it looks with the Proud Boys and all these crazy things that people are doing now. It's just [bangs table]—. I mean, I know we don't have anything to do with it. But it's just so hurtful and just all of their [road work of progress,] ways, and maps that were done before, it's just like they're trying to [go back in time.]

OL: Are you afraid that, like, it's sort of like reverting? Like society is almost reverting in some ways back to—?

EB: I'm not afraid because I'm one that—. I'm not going to go through what my ancestors went through. I'll die first. I'm not going to go through that. I'll stand up for my rights. That's what I'll do. So [when] my father said, "Don't get involved with this because you might get in trouble." Well, hey, if push come to shove, I'm gonna do what I have to do. [I am grown now and can make my own decisions.]

OL: And what about like your kids? I mean, how—. What was their, I guess, life like because when they grew up—. What, what years?

EB: My kids grew up in—. My oldest son was born in '78 and my youngest one was born in '85. So, so a lot of the stuff that we talk about they don't—. Like "Huh? What? What are you talking about? It ain't like that," you know. They've never witnessed anything. They only see what they see on the news or what they've seen people do around them.

OL: Do you find the same way with your grandchildren well or?

EB: Yeah.

OL: Okay.

EB: Mm-hmm. I do. I find the same thing. They don't—. When you talk about the old days, they don;t see any of that stuff going on, you know. They don't even fathom that at all.

OL: Yeah. And when, you know, your children, you know, when they were little, did the high school that they went to, was it a mixed school?

EB: Oh, yeah.

OL: Like even more so mixed than what Warwick was?

EB: Yes. My children went to Bethel.

OL: Okay.

EB: So they were very well mixed.

OL: And did you, like, feel, I guess, about that? Did you, you know, wish they grew up in a, like, almost Carver type [of environment]?

EB: No. Uh-uh. No.

OL: Okay.

EB: Those days [are] over. You know, the world has changed. Things have changed. And you got to go with change.

OL: Right.

EB: You got to go with change. Like I said, a lot of people are— the older people—the change is hard for them. But when you live in an environment and you've been around it, it's what it is. And you go with it. You treat people the way you want to be treated. That's the way I raised my kids. You want to be treated nice? You treat people nice. And that's the way I raised them.

OL: How do you like—. Do you think we missed any questions at all for you? Like, is there anything that you want to continue about? Like is there anything you want to say about just the movement, in general like—?

EB: I think we've covered everything. Mainly, we've talked about how hurtful it was.

OL: Right.

EB: It wasn't just hurtful for the Black people. It was hurtful for the White people as well. So it was just the law and we had to abide by the law.

OL: Do you think there's any like positives that came with it, though, that you went to a desegregated school?

EB: Like I said, we got to learn more about each other where, before, by staying in a Black school—. You know, you hear all these stories about how White people are ["all prejudice"] or the White people heard how "all Black people are lazy." Well, we learned that that's not true, you know.

OL: And do you, I guess, like as you grow older, do you ever, like, find yourself, like, thinking like, "Oh, it wasn't as bad" as it as you felt like it was going to Warwick?

EB: Well, now, yeah. It was bad then because I was a child. But as I've grown up and see how the world has changed and what's happened throughout the years, if I had to probably go through that now, it probably wouldn't be as upsetting to me as it was then, yeah.

OL: [to AS] Good. Is that it?

AS: Yeah.

OL: Good.

AS: Thank you so much.

OL: Yeah, so this was Mrs. Eula Branch. You know, thank you so much for coming out today. It was, you know, it was a great honor to talk to you.

EB: Okay.

OL: Learn about your past and whatnot. Do you have anything you'd like to say?

EB: Oh, well, thank you for inviting me for the interview. I've enjoyed it. Thank you.

OL: Absolutely, awesome. Yeah, that's great. Awesome, cool.

AS: Alright. [Papers rustling]

END OF INTERVIEW

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