

**Interview with Mary Ann Smith Tucker**  
***Lucy F. Simms School Oral History Project***

**Interview status:** Open to the Public

**Name of interviewee:** Mary Ann Smith Tucker

**Name of interviewers:** Camila Washington and Owen Longacre

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**Place of interview:** Simms Education Center

**Language of interview:** English

**Camila Washington 00:01**

My name is Camila Washington. My interviewee is with Miss Mary Ann Smith Tucker. The date is February 22, [2023]. We are at the Simms Education Center, and the date or the time is 4:05. So, to begin, just introduce yourself, you know, say anything that you like to do in your free time.

**Mary Ann Smith Tucker 00:23**

I am Mary Ann Smith Tucker. I grew up here in Harrisonburg. I attended Simms School, K through seventh. I am currently retired. I don't have very much free time. I do try and keep in touch as much as possible with some of my former students and some things around the community I'm helping to do.

**Camila Washington 00:48**

When did you move out of the Harrisonburg area?

**Mary Ann Smith Tucker 00:51**

Once I finished high school and left to go to college, which would have been 1969.

**Camila Washington 01:01**

So as a former student at the Simms School, can you tell us about the classes that you took while you were there? And what was it like being here with your aunt? And anything along those lines?

**Mary Ann Smith Tucker 01:15**

Well, classes here, I was, of course, elementary K through [seventh]. So we were in one classroom during the day, there was no change in classes the way you all do now. Seventh grade, we did change maybe three times during the day. P.E. and the gymnasium, cafeteria, and then mostly just the regular classrooms at that time.

**Camila Washington 01:46**  
What was your favorite class?

**Mary Ann Smith Tucker 01:50**  
Fifth grade, Mrs. Eubanks

**Owen Longacre 01:53**  
And that was Miss Eubanks?

**Camila Washington 01:53**  
[unclear]. [laughing]

**Mary Ann Smith Tucker 01:57**  
Mrs. Eubanks, Mary Eubanks. In fact, I still keep in touch with her.

**Camila Washington 02:02**  
Oh, wow.

**Mary Ann Smith Tucker 02:03**  
She lives in Maryland. And we do correspond Christmas cards every year. And she's, I would say, at least 90 by now.

**Owen Longacre 02:15**  
Wow.

**Mary Ann Smith Tucker 02:18**  
Yes.

**Camila Washington 02:18**  
So where did you live around, when you were attending the school?

**Mary Ann Smith Tucker 02:22**  
I lived at 395 Broad Street, on the corner. And that was the home that my grandfather built. It was a family home. And we had no buses at that time, so we all walked to school. I would say 15 minutes, maybe?

**Owen Longacre 02:45**  
And just for record. Could you just tell us what grades you would have attended Simms School, and roughly what years that might have been, to the best of your memory?

**Mary Ann Smith Tucker 02:58**

Well, kindergarten through seventh. You'll have to do the math on that one [laughter]. But, I was only here through the seventh grade. Eighth grade. I went to Thomas Harrison Junior.

**Owen Longacre** 03:12

Sure.

**Mary Ann Smith Tucker** 03:14

So in seventh grade was, I guess that's, was '66. Seventh grade [unclear].

**Owen Longacre** 03:20

Okay.

**Camila Washington** 03:23

Do you have any like specific memories that you remember when you were coming here?

**Mary Ann Smith Tucker** 03:29

Well, we did a lot of activities. I think that was very important. The Mayday programs, the assemblies... The music, the choir, of course, was a very big part of Simms School. And not just for the younger ones, but through the high school, with high school students because most of the choir students were older. But, if you've seen the picture in the hallway, we went up the ladder, even some of the elementary students participated. Mr. Moore was the director and Mrs. Fairfax, my aunt, was the pianist. We toured. And we did compete, you know, in other places, I know one year we went to Waynesboro; we competed in a choir festival type competition. I think we came in second place. That was a favorite thing.

**Camila Washington** 04:22

You also mentioned you did Girl Scouts last time?

**Mary Ann Smith Tucker** 04:25

Girl Scouts, we did have a Girl Scout troop. It was started by Mrs. Francis Francis. She was a local beautician and she did it at her home so that black girls could have a Girl Scout Brownie troop because otherwise, at that time, it was segregated. And so she was responsible for that, which I thought was pretty big at that time.

**Owen Longacre** 04:53

So, when you said you walked to school, about 15 minutes. When you showed up at school, you know, especially in your elementary years, walk us through what a typical day would have been like. What was your schedule like, and what was your normal routine?

**Mary Ann Smith Tucker** 05:15

That's a lot. Pretty much coming in, you knew where your classroom was, the teachers would be at the door usually to greet you, there may be the principal or teachers at the front main entrance to make sure that you go to your classes on time. Then you had your coursework

during the day. You had your lunch schedule, you had assigned P.E. time to have P.E. and the remainder of the day in classroom until dismissal. Just pretty normal. Basic.

**Owen Longacre** 05:51

How was the lunch period?

**Mary Ann Smith Tucker** 05:54

Lunch, just... I remember we would go through the lunch line. And we had the cafeteria, I believe at that time, was on the lower level. And we went downstairs to the cafeteria for lunch. And that was about 30 minutes in a day. Good days for P.E., we would go outside instead of just the gymnasium.

**Camila Washington** 06:27

What was the environment like in the classes?

**Mary Ann Smith Tucker** 06:32

Teachers at that particular time, I guess you all would consider very strict. You had the rules to follow. Very few students misbehaved in classes. For one reason, the teachers and the parents were very close. The teachers lived in the neighborhood, so they knew the parents, the parents knew the teachers. They participated in our churches... So if you misbehave at school during the day, your parents pretty much knew by the time you get home, [laughing] what happened so... We were on our P's and Q's to, do what we were supposed to do and get our work done and not misbehave.

**Camila Washington** 07:16

So the teachers were like really involved with the education with the kids?

**Mary Ann Smith Tucker** 07:20

Yes, absolutely.

**Camila Washington** 07:23

That's good.

**Owen Longacre** 07:24

Yeah, I've heard from other students that, I've heard them use that word strict. But perhaps not in the negative connotation that we might assume today, but that they cared for you. Is that an accurate statement?

**Mary Ann Smith Tucker** 07:40

Yes, absolutely.

**Owen Longacre** 07:44

And that they had high expectations for you. Am I characterizing them correctly that way?

**Mary Ann Smith Tucker 07:50**

A lot of the teachers here came from other places, most of them North Carolina.

**Camila Washington 07:50**

Oh, wow.

**Mary Ann Smith Tucker 07:58**

We had two gentlemen from South Carolina, one from Alabama. So, they were very serious about providing us with an education. And I think they wanted to make sure that they were doing all they could do, to come that far and to be here and helped a small community, you know, of African American students. So they were very invested in what they were doing. And when they left, it was like losing a family member, at that point, because they had been that close with us.

**Camila Washington 08:35**

Do you have a teacher inspired you? Like more than others?

**Mary Ann Smith Tucker 08:40**

My aunt, of course. [laughing]

**Camila Washington 08:42**

Good answer.

**Mary Ann Smith Tucker 08:44**

And Mrs. Eubanks, she was my favorite.

**Camila Washington 08:47**

What subjects did she teach?

**Mary Ann Smith Tucker 08:49**

Fifth grade. So it was all...

**Camila Washington 08:55**

So you've mentioned that she was your aunt. What was it like having her as a family member, but also being a teacher here and attending this school?

**Mary Ann Smith Tucker 09:04**

In my aunt's classroom, I was a student, period. There were no exceptions made. I was held to the same standards. I had the same requirements. And if I didn't do what I was supposed to do, I had the same punishment. So she did not make any exceptions.

**Owen Longacre 09:24**

One thing I haven't asked yet, but I'll ask you since you, your teacher, was also your aunt. What was discipline like if someone did, you know get out of line or do anything? Were there any- Seemed like maybe you'd remember some things?

**Mary Ann Smith Tucker** 09:42

Well, for one thing, the principal had a paddle, and at that time you could paddle. And this was the office next door and you would go in his back office, and he would close the door and he would paddle. I was never paddled, but several boys were paddled, and Miss Arrington, some students might tell you this, she was the fourth-grade teacher. She had a yardstick that she called Betsy, and if you misbehaved in Miss Arrington's class, Betsy hit the knuckles, which was painful. [laughing]

**Camila Washington** 10:23

I believe it.

**Mary Ann Smith Tucker** 10:26

I'm... trying to think of who else.

**Owen Longacre** 10:29

Was this principal [W.N.P] Harris?

**Mary Ann Smith Tucker** 10:31

No, Giles.

**Owen Longacre** 10:33

Giles, okay.

**Mary Ann Smith Tucker** 10:34

Mr. Giles. Miss Arrington fourth grade. I don't know too much about how the coaches worked with the boys as far as discipline. But I know the paddle was the main office technique.

**Camila Washington** 10:50

Did you do any other extracurriculars other than Girl Scouts and choir?

**Mary Ann Smith Tucker** 10:55

No, not that at that time. There wasn't a lot, you know, available because of the situation.

**Owen Longacre** 11:05

You mentioned May Day and I do want to circle back to that, of course. That's a celebration that seems to be very unique to the Simms School and also a tradition that later carried on to the Harrisonburg City Public Schools at Waterman Elementary, and they still celebrate May Day. I guess my question was, do you know, have any idea of how that started or how your aunt, Mrs. Awkard Fairfax, created that as an event for the school or maybe where that originated from?

**Mary Ann Smith Tucker** 11:38

I think they had researched a May Day and Maypole and May Day tradition, and she and some of the other teachers, maybe Mrs. Bates. Mrs. Arrington, Mrs. Eubanks... They worked as a

committee. And they set up the program, they developed the Maypole. They had parents and teachers who made costumes. Each grade level had a representative in the court for the May Queen. And then there was a May Queen that was elected. And we all voted for the May Queen. And that particular day was an all-day festivity in the back of the school. And there were games and the court, the May Court they had a queen, had a king, and they had their thrones and their crowns. And it was like a real queen and king. It was a big, big activity, day-long activity.

**Owen Longacre** 12:42

Sounds like Homecoming.

**Mary Ann Smith Tucker** 12:44

Similar, very similar.

**Camila Washington** 12:47

Like once a year?

**Mary Ann Smith Tucker** 12:48

Yes, I believe it was usually May the first if it fell on a school day.

**Camila Washington** 12:56

So our understanding was that the school was an important pillar in the surrounding community. Did you feel that this was true?

**Mary Ann Smith Tucker** 13:04

The school at that time was definitely the foundation of the community. Because most activities outside of church would take place here.

**Owen Longacre** 13:17

What type of activities might take place here?

**Mary Ann Smith Tucker** 13:23

Piano recitals, the chorus, their work, plays... Sometimes I think they used, some of the churches may have used the auditorium-gymnasium for a large gathering of people.

**Camila Washington** 13:45

How was the community around here different than like outside of the Simms School?

**Mary Ann Smith Tucker** 13:49

I would say, because it was a small black population, there was a closeness, a bond. It was pretty much confined to these five or six streets. A lot of people didn't wander out very much outside of the community. We had a store, Mrs. Lena Stewart had a store on Kelly Street. That was a small convenience store, and she would- Could call it a convenience store today, but that was our neighborhood store. And that was the only neighborhood store that we had.

**Owen Longacre** 14:39

I know that students came to the Simms School from all over, from as far as Luray in the north, to West Virginia in the west, but the community here around Simms School maybe had something special. My question is, did what how many students at the Simms School do you think came from the surrounding immediate community? And, what was the relationship like with students who maybe were bussed in from Rockingham or from other parts that might not have lived right here and would have been able to walk to school? Were you able to maintain friendships with those students? Or did the distance kind of keep some of those things from happening?

**Mary Ann Smith Tucker** 15:28

No, what happened with that, and I don't know what the bussing situation was like, or if their parents brought them. I'm not sure about that part. But we did have students from Grottoes, Elkton, McGaheysville, Bridgewater. Maybe as far as... what's after Bridgewater?

**Owen Longacre** 16:01

Dayton.

**Mary Ann Smith Tucker** 16:03

Maybe Dayton?

**Owen Longacre** 16:05

Mount Jackson.

**Mary Ann Smith Tucker** 16:06

I don't- not that far out of the way. But those students did come here because there was no place for them to go. They had to come here. But yes, that was one of the things; we made friends with a lot of people from different places. And that was one of the losses, in a sense, when schools integrated, because then we lost our friends, and some we kept in touch with, but a lot we never saw anymore. And the boys had been on the basketball teams or they had participated. I mean, this was their school, and they were our friends. But that was a loss in a sense with the integration.

**Camila Washington** 16:43

You mentioned you went to Thomas Harrison after you went to Seventh Grade. Was that before or after desegregation?

**Mary Ann Smith Tucker** 16:50

That was '66-'67. So, yes, that was the first year, I believe.

**Camila Washington** 16:59

So, what was your initial reaction to desegregation, and what did you feel in that moment when you first heard about it?

**Mary Ann Smith Tucker** 17:09

I think there was apprehension. Our parents, of course, had concerns of how their children were going to be treated because you're going to a completely new environment. And I think they wanted improvement. They wanted their children to have the opportunities. But of course, there was that uncertainty of how you're going to adapt. How will the teachers adapt to the students? How will we adapt to new teachers? A whole new environment, a new building... Everything was changing. So I felt like it was time because certain things here were lacking. We didn't have the materials, we didn't have the equipment. And we really needed to have a better situation. And that was a positive. And I thought when we did transition, it was a smooth transition compared to some places in the United States. We did not have that problem here. Not that I'm aware of.

**Camila Washington** 18:19

How did your parents react when they heard the news?

**Mary Ann Smith Tucker** 18:23

Mixed feelings, mixed feelings... They wanted, of course, my parents' goal was always for me to go to college.

**Camila Washington** 18:31

Yeah.

**Mary Ann Smith Tucker** 18:31

So, they wanted me to have the best education I could have. But again, there's that fear maybe, of how will it transition? Will she be okay? You know, will people be nice? Or...

**Owen Longacre** 18:46

Do you feel like the reaction from maybe your parents and that generation, and maybe you as a student, and being younger, was that a different reaction to the thought of going to a new school? Or, did you feel like you shared some of the same feelings?

**Mary Ann Smith Tucker** 19:09

I think different.

**Owen Longacre** 19:11

And why might that be?

**Mary Ann Smith Tucker** 19:13

Well, at that age, at that time, I think our main focus was going to a new school. And you're not thinking about all the repercussions, or all the seriousness, or the politics that play into a transition like that.

**Camila Washington** 19:33

Can you tell us about what it was like being in a desegregated school like, for the first time? And, if you had any like experiences that stay with you today?

**Mary Ann Smith Tucker** 19:46

I think the main thing was, well, first of all, you had to become accustomed to the building, which was much larger than this building. You had to learn your way around. Teachers who were, I thought, very accommodating, because they understood that we were making a major change. And I only had maybe two that I did not feel comfortable with when I went to junior high school. But otherwise, I felt like the teachers did their best. The choir director, I can't remember her name, Mrs. Hartman, I believe? She pulled in a lot of our choir members into the Harrisonburg High School choir. So that kind of gave you a little feeling of connectedness there. And of course, the boys, I always felt like boys had it a little bit easier because they have sports.

**Camila Washington** 20:42

Yeah.

**Mary Ann Smith Tucker** 20:43

And Howard Stevens, you may have heard of him a long time ago. He was one of the first black boys to play on the football team. And then several other boys were on the basketball team, so it made it a little easier for boys, I think, than girls.

**Camila Washington** 20:57

Did you make any like new friends?

**Mary Ann Smith Tucker** 21:00

Yes, I did. Several, several. And I saw them at my 50th reunion a few years ago.

**Camila Washington** 21:09

Oh, wow.

**Owen Longacre** 21:10

As you transitioned from Simms School to Thomas Harrison, you mentioned some of the physical differences. What was the classwork like and how did that compare? What was your experience like in the classroom?

**Mary Ann Smith Tucker** 21:23

The classroom experience was quite different. For instance, with science, when we moved to Thomas Harrison and on to Harrisonburg High School, well Thomas Harrison the first year, we had very limited science equipment. For instance, in your science lab, where you'd never done an experiment, or we'd never dissected a frog. And, that was something brand new to us, that we had to learn. P.E. equipment. I remember gymnastics was brand new to me. I almost never heard of, what is gymnastics? And then the balance beams and the parallel bars, and all of that had to be new. Foreign language... My first year, I did take Latin, horrible experience [laughing]. But these were things that, honestly, we hadn't been totally prepared for. And not for lack of the

teachers trying, but not having the materials that they needed to work with what equipment that they needed to work with. So they did the best that they could do under the circumstances.

**Owen Longacre** 22:38

Yeah, and that feeling of maybe seeing this new world... I'm always interested in, like, what... What feelings were you thinking as you were getting exposed to Latin and gymnastics, and these other things?

**Mary Ann Smith Tucker** 22:54

Overwhelming.

**Owen Longacre** 22:55

Okay.

**Mary Ann Smith Tucker** 22:56

In the beginning, very overwhelming. In fact, I had, my mother even had a tutor for me, I think my first year of high school to kind of help me make the adjustment. Because it was a lot when you are not accustomed to the larger classes, the larger building, the new teachers... The curriculum was a little more difficult, and, yeah, it could be very overwhelming at times.

**Owen Longacre** 22:56

Were there any feelings of anger or maybe frustration that this had been your first time seeing some of those new subjects, or...

**Mary Ann Smith Tucker** 23:35

I wouldn't say anger, but it just was a realization of what we had been missing by being in a segregated school. And you did feel a little behind, left behind, and we had to play catch up to be where we should have been. And the other students, it came natural to them because they'd had it all the time. And we didn't. So that was a little unnerving.

**Owen Longacre** 24:06

And maybe, would it be fair to say what was denied?

**Mary Ann Smith Tucker** 24:08

Yes, exactly.

**Owen Longacre** 24:10

Right.

**Camila Washington** 24:13

Did you feel like a sense of loss when the school shut down?

**Mary Ann Smith Tucker** 24:17

Yes. With the teachers, and... Especially the teachers and some of my very close friends that were in those situations with Grottoes or Elkton and they moved away.

**Owen Longacre 24:31**

Yeah, and to couple that question, we've talked about a lot that desegregation is typically considered to be a positive movement, but there were a lot of unintended consequences. And I've heard you say that you had lost friends. And maybe, I'd love to hear more about maybe how you felt of the loss of teachers. And, were there any other ideas of what those unintended consequences might have been and how that impacted your experience or other persons in the neighborhood?

**Mary Ann Smith Tucker 24:42**

Yes. Well, I think with the teachers, as I may have stated before, most of them came from other states. So not only did we just lose them here at the school, they moved back home, they went back to North Carolina or Alabama, wherever they had come from. And with the friends, when you go from a classroom of maybe 16 to a class of 25 or 30, and we were all in different classes. So it may be one black student in a class, two black students in a class... So you may not see your friends all day, because you could be on a completely different track, as they used to call it. If you went to an academic track or vocational track, you just pass in the hallway, unless maybe it was elective, an elective class, but otherwise, you may not see those friends. So that caused some separation, where we weren't as close anymore, we didn't see each other all day, we weren't together all day. We used to walk home from school because it was very close, and you have your little group of friends you walk home with every day, so that changed. Because most of us, we did walk to school when we had to walk out to High Street. And then there were a few high school students were lucky enough to have cars. So a few of them had cars, but most of us had to walk, or our parents would pick us up. So we didn't have the little neighborhood strolling home every day, stop at the store and buy ice cream and little things like that.

**Owen Longacre 26:38**

And so you walked from your house on Broad Street all the way to Thomas Harrison?

**Mary Ann Smith Tucker 26:42**

Oh, yes.

**Owen Longacre 26:44**

That's not close.

**Mary Ann Smith Tucker 26:45**

No, it is not. And that was rain, or sleet, or snow. Because we had no buses. And even when we had prom, this is later, I'm going down the line to when I was at the high school, we had girls who walked to the prom in their gowns and the boys in their tuxedos.

**Owen Longacre 27:06**

That must have been, 45 minutes almost?

**Mary Ann Smith Tucker** 27:10

Probably, with the traffic and everything because High Street, we had to go, well depending, usually way up. I'm trying to think, how did we go, Rock Street maybe? Up to High Street, where the old high school is, and that was the junior high school. Yes, that was quite a walk.

**Camila Washington** 27:31

Can you explain like more about the difference in education attending the Simms School or Thomas Harrison versus going to Harrisonburg High School?

**Mary Ann Smith Tucker** 27:44

Not anymore, really, than I've already said. It's mostly the situation with the materials, the experiences in the labs, the foreign language, things of that sort. I don't know what foreign language was taught here because I wasn't here during the high school years.

**Owen Longacre** 28:06

Right.

**Mary Ann Smith Tucker** 28:06

But someone can probably fill that part in for you.

**Owen Longacre** 28:11

Were there any teachers that were able to follow you to either Thomas Harrison or, eventually, Harrisonburg High?

**Mary Ann Smith Tucker** 28:17

Mrs. Blakey went to Harrisonburg High School as a business teacher. Barbara Blakey, we had two Blakeys. Barbara Blakey was our typing teacher at Harrisonburg High School. Mrs. Pat Blakey went to a different elementary school in Harrisonburg; I'm not sure which one. My aunt was assigned to Waterman Elementary School. And I believe they're the only [four] everyone else left. Miss Amelia Jones did become a secretary at Harrisonburg High School. [Note: Ms. Arrington did go to an elementary school.]

**Owen Longacre** 28:59

Did you happen to have any of them for a teacher in the new school?

**Mary Ann Smith Tucker** 29:02

Just Mrs. Blakey, she was the only one I had for typing. But it was interesting, they were all in different schools. After being here teaching together, they were all at different schools. My aunt was the only black teacher at Waterman. Miss Arrington, I believe, was the only black teacher at Spotswood Elementary, and Mrs. Blakey was at Harrisonburg High School, so they lost a little unity as well.

**Owen Longacre 29:33**

Now, I know, I was going to ask, did your aunt ever talk about what that was like, going to Waterman? That transition for her as a professional, you know, going from one school to another?

**Mary Ann Smith Tucker 29:48**

She has an interview. Did you hear the interview? Have ya'll heard it? And then she had a documentary, I believe with, I'm trying to think what she did that with, maybe with JMU, or EM, maybe Eastern Mennonite. And she went into detail about the transition. I think initially, she had some problems with some teachers not wanting to work together. And then she had a principal, Mr. O'Donnel, that, I would say, helped her ease into the transition. She thought a lot of him. And he seemed to think a very a lot of her. And by the time she was there a couple of years, she was doing May Day again, had May Day performances and different things at Waterman. And she taught at Waterman a long time until she retired and had many friendships in the end. But initially, I know she had some difficulty.

**Owen Longacre 30:53**

I just wanted to ask that, about the Simms School, the building itself, did you return back to the school for any events or anything? You know, once the school shut down and talked about how it was the foundation of this community, and... What happened to the building? Do you remember ever coming back for any events or?

**Mary Ann Smith Tucker 31:16**

No, not really, not until recently. When we started on this project, it's probably the first time I had been back to this building, which was a long time. They did have reunions; they were doing reunions every five years with Effinger, which was the school prior to Simms. The Effinger-Simms reunions were done approximately every three to five years. But they were usually held at what used to be Belle Mead Motel out on South Main Street, but never here at the school. Now, I believe the last reunion they had maybe six years ago was held here, but I didn't attend that particular reunion. But they have started utilizing the building more. As far as the community, they've had some receptions here and different functions of Carlton Banks, who passed recently, was a close friend and cousin of mine and his repass was held here after the service. So they're beginning to pull the building back into community activities, it seems.

**Owen Longacre 32:30**

So you mentioned they had reunions here for the Effinger Street School? Of course, the Effinger Street School no longer stands.

**Mary Ann Smith Tucker 32:38**

But it wasn't here.

**Owen Longacre 32:39**

You're right.

**Mary Ann Smith Tucker** 32:40

Yes.

**Owen Longacre** 32:40

It would've been streets away.

**Mary Ann Smith Tucker** 32:43

Down, way down at the bottom near where you had the Safeway and the ABC stores down that way now, that used to be Effinger Street.

**Owen Longacre** 32:55

And, so my question, actually, is about the fact that that school no longer exists, and I was wondering, it's maybe not exactly related, but where you also, did you experience some of the urban renewal that happened in Harrisonburg in the 1960s? And, did that impact your family at all in terms of housing and property because that was very closely intertwined with the desegregation and shutting down the Simms School... You mentioned your family home was on Broad Street, was that impacted at all by...

**Mary Ann Smith Tucker** 33:25

Gay Street, our house was on the corner of Broad and Gay, and we lost half of our yard because they widened Gay Street. And then going from the corner of Broad and Gay, down to Mason Street and Main Street. Homes were on Gay Street on both sides of Gay Street. They were black-owned homes. All of those homes were taken. And the homes on Effinger Street were taken, the school was taken. And that resulted in a lot of people being displaced. So, excuse me, some received stipends to rebuild, which resulted in the brick houses along Broad Street, but also in the public housing projects of Hill Street and Kelly Street. And also they built some public housing project-type homes on Broad Street, mostly occupied by the elderly in that section.

**Owen Longacre** 34:34

You mentioned your family home was on Broad Street. Was that impacted at all by...

**Mary Ann Smith Tucker** 34:39

Broad and Gay. We were right on the corner.

**Owen Longacre** 34:42

Okay, so is your grandfather's house, is it still there?

**Mary Ann Smith Tucker** 34:45

It's still there. It's not in the best of shape anymore, but a lot of the property- We also owned a lot behind that house with another home that Aunt Mary [Awkard] used to live in before she was married, so that house was also taken. And both sides of Gay Street, there were several on Effinger Street. There were some on Washington Street, that were taken. So that was a big impact, as far as the housing.

**Owen Longacre 35:19**

I was going to ask, and pardon me, but I, can you describe your feelings during that time when that happened? However raw they might be or whether...

**Mary Ann Smith Tucker 35:34**

Because of the age that I was and because I was leaving to go to college, it didn't affect me as much as it did some of my friends who stayed behind in Harrisonburg and were very distraught and upset because their parents' houses were torn down. They had to move to different locations. But I just wasn't here to really feel the impact of all that. Going down Broad Street, that whole block had black homes, and none of those homes were affected. Broad Street was pretty much preserved.

**Camila Washington 36:19**

What did you do after high school? I know you mentioned you went to college?

**Mary Ann Smith Tucker 36:24**

That was about it. I went to college and never moved back, unfortunately. But it's something that happens sometimes. Sometimes you move back home sometimes you don't. And I went to college and married early, and had my son, and went back to graduate school, started teaching. That's why I ended up in Chesterfield, Petersburg. My first teaching job was in Hopewell, then I moved to Petersburg, where I taught first grade, second, third, fifth, and sixth, and then eventually to Chesterfield County, and I taught seventh-grade history, and that's when I retired. So, I would come back and visit, but I didn't come back to live.

**Owen Longacre 37:10**

I didn't realize you taught history.

**Mary Ann Smith Tucker 37:14**

Yes.

**Camila Washington 37:16**

What influenced you to teach that?

**Mary Ann Smith Tucker 37:18**

My uncle was a history professor, Joseph Awkard, Jr. History and psychology.

**Camila Washington 37:29**

What college did you attend?

**Mary Ann Smith Tucker 37:33**

Virginia State.

**Owen Longacre 37:36**

I've heard that before from some other interviewees, Virginia State. Was that a popular destination? Or was that something that you were maybe pointed in the direction towards?

**Mary Ann Smith Tucker** 37:47

Virginia State started as a normal school. Aunt Mary went to Virginia State and several other- I think Dr. Goldie Nicholas went to Virginia State, because again, you had limited opportunities. In this area, several families sent their children to Virginia State College. The Washington family, there were several of them that went to Virginia State. Donna Rhodes did go to- I believe Donna went to Hampton. And her sisters I think went to Hampton, because Hampton was a historically black school. But Virginia State was very popular in his area.

**Camila Washington** 38:29

So how did the Simms School and going to Harrisonburg influence you in the, your future after he graduated?

**Mary Ann Smith Tucker** 38:49

I would say my love of teaching. Having my aunt as a teacher, my uncle being in the education field... And again, at that time, there weren't a lot of opportunities, job opportunities for young black women. You know, now you can do anything. You can go anywhere, but a lot of times, teaching was the main occupation for women of my age and color at that time. So I would say that would probably be the main factor, the reason that I went into teaching. When you look back at the Simms School, what do you feel its legacy is? Being the center, the foundation, as we said earlier. You know, this was the connecting force for the neighborhood, for the teachers as well as the parents and the students. As we said, some of the teachers lived in the homes. In our home on Broad Street, we had three teachers to board with us.

**Owen Longacre** 39:58

Oh, wow.

**Mary Ann Smith Tucker** 40:00

The home economics teacher, Mrs. Campbell, she was a resident of Washington DC. And her husband worked in Washington in the government, so she would commute on the weekends. But she would stay at our house during the week. Another teacher, Mrs. Foster, her husband was in the military, and she boarded with us. He was stationed in North Carolina. And when she left, she moved back to North Carolina. And then our last teacher that came to board with us was Mrs. Miller. and Mrs. Miller's husband was in the military. She would stay with us during the school year, and then go home. And it was funny because when I started teaching in Petersburg, her son turned up in my classroom.

**Owen Longacre** 40:56

Okay.

**Mary Ann Smith Tucker** 40:56

And I told him, I said, I know you, I remember you when you were a baby [laugther]. Your mother used to live in my house. So it was funny. It was really a funny coincidence.

**Owen Longacre** 41:06

Wow, so not only were they close in your neighborhood, but some of them lived in your own home.

**Mary Ann Smith Tucker** 41:12

Yes. And I believe some stayed on Mason Street in the Atkins home. I don't know if you've ever heard of it, that was a pretty prestigious big house at one time. I think they boarded teachers as well.

**Camila Washington** 41:25

Would you say the Simms School was the main place for African Americans to be around? Like a main community?

**Mary Ann Smith Tucker** 41:35

Yes, yes. Absolutely.

**Camila Washington** 41:39

Was there anywhere else that you could go about?

**Mary Ann Smith Tucker** 41:45

Well, things were opening up at the time. So there were dances and social events at the armory on Friday nights. And we would go to that. We could go skating. The theaters were beginning to open up because they were still a little segregated where you had to sit upstairs in the balcony. You couldn't sit downstairs. Department stores, same thing, restrooms were still a little segregated. I remember going to Leggett's Department Store, and you couldn't use the restroom. So, we were getting there, but some places weren't quite there at that point. Court Square, they used to have water fountains, there was a colored water fountain and a white water fountain. So we're transitioning, but it took a little while for everything to open up the way it should have been.

**Owen Longacre** 42:49

So as we think about the Simms School, was there any other memories or any other thoughts or things that you might not have had a chance to share that come to mind? You look back on the school or the faculty or anything else you might have experienced during that time?

**Mary Ann Smith Tucker** 43:05

One thing I was going to mention, Mrs. Mary Glick. She was our home economics teacher, the last home economics teacher when I was here. She was the only Caucasian teacher at Simms.

**Owen Longacre** 43:21

I didn't realize there was one.

**Mary Ann Smith Tucker** 43:22

She was the only one, and she was [an] awesome teacher. She set up a trip for the girls in our class; I guess that was my seventh-grade class. She took us to State College, Pennsylvania. And she organized a trip, the transportation, and she set up guest homes for us to stay in, which was a very new experience. Number one, you're leaving the state, you're going to State College, you're going to college campus. And the generosity of these people who did not know us, they'd never seen us before, and they opened their doors to us and we stayed there for two days. Some of the parents went along with us. But she orchestrated a trip, and I'll never forget that. That was just, one of the highlights of my being here at Simms. I don't know if she's ever really gotten enough credit for what she did. And I also appreciate the fact that I'm sure it was difficult for her to be the only Caucasian teacher here. So she had adjustments to make, and she did a very good job.

**Owen Longacre** 44:38

Do you have any understanding of how that might have come to be?

**Mary Ann Smith Tucker** 44:43

She was the only one that I guess they could locate that would come here because the other home economics teacher, Mrs. Campbell, as I had mentioned, she moved back to Washington.

**Owen Longacre** 44:57

Okay.

**Mary Ann Smith Tucker** 44:58

And I guess they couldn't find another black home economics teacher. So we had Mrs. Glick, but she was a jewel, she really was. I can't think of anything else... Do you have anything else?

**Camila Washington** 45:22

I asked all of mine... I guess, do you think any of your experiences at the Simms school led to where your teaching career went?

**Mary Ann Smith Tucker** 45:36

I guess observation of the way these teachers related to their students, looking at the types of relationships they had, the classroom environment. As I said, our teachers were very strict, and I was told by my students that I was very strict. [laughing] Because I sort of followed in those footsteps.

**Owen Longacre** 46:03

Well, I'll just recap. We took a moment to think about the years that you spent here from kindergarten through seventh grade. We talked a little bit about your schedule at the beginning of the day, what your environment was like in the classes, and spent a lot of time talking about the teachers that inspired you, from your aunt to Mrs. Bates, Mrs. Arrington, and many others, and talked a lot about how the school, I think I remember you saying it was the center or a

connecting force in the community. And so as we, as we do come to a close with, do of those, recapping any of that, was there anything you felt like was left out or you wanted to add when it comes to thinking about the Simms School and the eventual desegregation? And going over to Thomas Harrison and Harrisonburg High, was there anything you just wanted to add before we come to a close?

**Mary Ann Smith Tucker** 47:03

I don't think so. I think we've just about covered everything that I can remember from that point in time. There may be some additional things some of the older students can share with you all, who stayed here through 12th grade. But with me leaving at seventh grade, that's probably it for me.

**Owen Longacre** 47:27

Okay. Do you have any more questions?

**Camila Washington** 47:30

I think I've asked all my questions.

**Mary Ann Smith Tucker** 47:32

Well, I am so glad that you all are doing this project.

**Camila Washington** 47:35

Thank you.