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Tidewater Voices Oral History Project
Old Dominion University
Norfolk, Virginia
For Research Purposes Only
Recorded on 1 November 2019

Sex, Age, Place of Birth, City of Habitation

S1: M 21 Woodbridge, VA; Norfolk, VA

S2: M 23 Vietnam; Virginia Beach, VA

S2: okay so can you give me your name first of all

S1: [WORDS REMOVED]

S2: and last name

S1: [WORDS REMOVED]

S2: [WORDS REMOVED]<LAUGH> okay um birth year if you don't mind

S1: oh nineteen ninety-eight

S2: and can you tell me where you were born

S1: I was born in Woodbridge Virginia

S2: and that's toward the northern part of Virginia right

S1: yes

S2: so you're not from the Tidewater area

S1: uh no i'm not

S2: um can you tell me when you moved here

S1: I moved to this area four years ago

S2: and what was it like growing up in Woodbridge

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S1: um it was pretty okay um it's a generally safe area [S2: mhm] there's not too much going on although people would often characterize it as the hood if they were from other places around Woodbridge

S2: around Woodbridge so yours is the non-hood and all the other places were considered the hood

S1: no Woodbridge was considered the hood sometimes people from Woodbridge would call it hoodbridge <HN LAUGHS> instead um although not much actually happened there there wasn't much crime really other than occasionally people's cars would get broken into [S2: mhm] or something like that but nothing major uh for the most part anyways

S2: for the most part was it a small area

S1: um no Woodbridge is um quite a large area especially compared to the towns around it [S2: mhm] it's it's larger than quite a bit of them it's not as big as something like Richmond but I think it has around twenty thousand people or so [S2: mhm] so it's quite a bit larger than uh areas surrounding it like Dumfries and Triangle which have seven thousand five thousand people

S2: were there any um anything about Woodbridge culturally that distinguishes it from surrounding places or just here

S1: I would say that it's it's a much more suburban kind of area um you're a lot more likely if you're just walking around uh as far as individual neighborhoods to easily find like see a lot of people that you've seen before you're not going to be seeing a lot of new people all that often most of the time people tend to stay in their kinda neighborhood it was a fairly religious area sometimes you'd have um people uh with their children on

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standing on corners with signs saying like god hates fags [S2: oh okay] and stuff like that so it wasn't the most accepting place of uh sexual minorities but you you know you had quite a few churches um there was always construction going on um there was always lots to do since Woodbridge was larger you uh many places you could kinda go to and it wasn't far or it isn't far from places like DC or or far from Richmond if you wanted to go somewhere like that there's would be plenty to do but as far as Woodbridge's culture itself there wasn't much going on I would say to distinguish it other than the fact that it was pretty quiet most of the time you didn't have much going on but a lot of the younger people would try to like seem like they're tough by <HN LAUGH> you know trying to rob stores that were near the school um and so you'd get a lot of that happening I would say most of the people I went to school with were um like um minorities you still had quite a few White people uh when I was still living in Woodbridge but I would say it was a good mix um of of uh different ethnicities [S2: mhm] and racial groups going on but you'd still have that sort of stigma in some ways I know in my elementary school a good amount of my teachers were Black in middle school most of them were White when I was still living in Woodbridge and uh about my uh seventh year uh seventh grade I moved to Dumfries which is like five minutes away from Woodbridge they're very close [S2: mhm] Dumfries is less than (0:05:00) half the size as far as population goes

S2: and was that very similar to Woodbridge

S1: uh yeah it's pretty similar you would still get those people standing on the corners with their signs there was still a number of people who were homeless who you'd see walking up and down the street um you you'd still have quite a few people who were religious but as far as when I was in high school there I had I could find a good group of

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people who weren't religious um but their parents were and yeah you still had very much this push like you know you go to church well that's what a lot of people did my family particularly uh my parents are religious but they don't go to church my grandma does all the time though um but as far as cultural sort of differences I wouldn't say there was much other than Dumfries was probably even quieter it's a it was in a way where if something happened that was kinda bad you just didn't hear about it that much it was one of those things where if something did happen it wasn't published publicized all too much um it was it was very much kept not exactly under the wraps but it wasn't something that was in like local news talked about all that much most of my information if it was something pretty bad that happened um was through learning it in my in my class because I took a criminal justice class and we talk about crimes in the area [S2: mhm] you wouldn't see it in our local news but we we heard about um this this one thing that happened in Dumfries where these two women were killed like this domestic uh incident where the police were called and um the police woman ended up dying the two men who were also there the two other police officers they were severely wounded but they ended up surviving and the um wife of the um perpetrator ended up you know killing her as well [S2: oh geez] but that certainly like that wasn't on the news or anything really um but we talked about it in my criminal justice class and and our professor <LAUGH> our teacher even had us look at the uh funeral of the proceedings for uh because she was saying how it felt close to home because she's she's a police officer so she talking about how it could have been her and all that so so we at the uh and there was this other thing that happened specifically at the school I went to where this uh female teacher was caught uh having like inappropriate relations with a male student

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<HN LAUGH> and you know at first we weren't allowed to hear anything about it as students you know teachers you would hear whispers but if anyone asked it was like you're not we're not supposed to tell you luckily we were told anyway people figured it out it wasn't too difficult to kind of get the bearing of what was happening [S2: mhm] and um she ended up when she was caught she she was married and she had kids and everything and I guess the threat of all that stuff being taken away she ended up uh taking her own life and we that was not like on our local news all that much it was maybe for like a day or two but it wasn't anything that was considered I guess huge news for our area which was interesting to me um I think Dumfries is one of those areas where it wants to very much give that appearance of lots of safety and generally it is pretty safe it's like a quintessential part of boring suburban area [S2: mhm] where not much happens except irritating neighbors possibly <HN LAUGHS> but even that there isn't too much going on um as far as I don't know like huge kind of cultural things happening um there's just not much to do in Dumfries we have the only well the only thing culturally actually now that I think of that's really significant is that our signs for our for the sign would say like old town of Dumfries and how it's the first or one of the first (0:10:00) towns to be established in Virginia so we'll talk about that and we have a museum well it's called a museum but it's really just a house <HN LAUGH> that that um this one guy owned and I've never gone there because I I don't care to but I have to pass it every day if I'm in the area like that in Dumfries and it's like Weem-Botts uh house I don't know who that is I think he was like a plantation owner or something but um that's essentially it that's like the only strict kind of cultural artifact that's in the town other than saying this was one of the first established towns in Virginia [S2: mhm] you have that house and other than it's

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just random kinda stores and surprisingly enough of how small the population is we have a Walmart and like a Food Lion [S2: <LAUGH> there's a Walmart everywhere] cross the street from each other it's interesting cause like Triangle's half the size but they don't and they don't have a Walmart at all they don't have any grocery stores [S2: mhm] so you'd have to like drive to Dumfries or something to to get anything which is interesting to me but yeah

S2: and you say they um with all the crimes it doesn't make local news you think that's because they're trying to um keep the city from panicking or you say it's to cover up the make themselves look better right [S1: yeah] keep up appearances is it for the outside looking in thinking it's a safe place

S1: I don't necessarily think it's the outside looking in because not many people move to Dumfries in general um the population stays relatively small although they have you know over the years built more apartment buildings and everything in the area I think it's more so for the people who live there cause you want to feel like you're living in a safe place and I suppose it does connect to anyone who's considering to Dumfries but I think it's more so for the people who are already living there cause for the most part nobody wants to think uh that bad things could happen where they live I think it's it's why you get that uh typical narrative that when something bad happens and it reaches like national news and it's a small town they talk about oh this could never happen here [S2: mhm] um and I and I think it's the same sort of idea that's going into this where it's not necessarily that these things don't happen it's kind of this desire to act as though they don't happen close to home like oh that's a problem that's for over there I think

S2: but the people who live there are aware that these things happen

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S1: to some extent but I feel I don't think my parents or or a lot of other people in our neighborhood would really be thinking about these things or or knowing about it really [S2: mhm] um you know even the thing with the teacher at the school I mean I my parents found out about found out about that of course cause they have to tell the parents about something like that but with the uh police officer that was killed um that wasn't talked about the only thing i can think of that happened that was really talked about and i can't remember if it was exactly in Dumfries or an adjacent town but that one was talked about a lot cause this guy was disgruntled with i believe his ex-wife um not that it matters all that much whether they were still married or not but she had a routine of always going to um i think it was like Chick-fil-A but either way she was in the drive-thru for it and he just walked up to her car and he uh shoots her in the head and that was something that we had known about quite a bit and i think partially is because not even that it was talked about a lot but more so cause it was blatantly obvious that it happened cause they had to rope off the whole that whole area as a as a crime scene cause he walked from his car and you have to track that and all that so the whole drive-thru of that was roped off and you have to drive past it all the time and so that was very much something that couldn't be just like oh that didn't happen or or not even that it didn't happen but just kind of ignoring the fact that it did [S2: all right] um but other than kind of that a lot of the stuff that goes on isn't really talked about which is interesting to me because it's not like it's super (0:15:00) often in in that area you know you don't get too often where someone was killed [S2: mhm] um yet it's not reported on all that much like we just don't have our cries reported on much in general other than that it's like maybe a break-in or something but yeah

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S2: and did that change your day-to-day life make you think twice about say walking out on the street or being more concerned about your safety

S1: um i wouldn't say so but only because i have at that point i was already fairly paranoid person and so walking out at night by myself already felt like an incredibly daunting thing so it didn't really change my perception about that and even at that time i had this slight understanding not as uh developed as it is now but the beginnings of an understanding that most of the time when people do these acts it's to somebody they know and i really didn't uh concern myself too much with what a stranger might do cause more than likely it won't be a stranger so just like walking out at night i would be wary of people but not so much so that i wouldn't still go out i guess like i might um create more distance between me and that other person uh if i'm uh walking down the street and have to pass by them um i'm not as paranoid about that now but definitely around that time it was very much this feeling of kind of paranoia about other people um and then and them trying to come into contact with me in some unfavorable way [S2: mhm]

S2: um do you think you talk like a person from Woodbridge

S1: uh i somewhat yes uh yeah somewhat yes because i i think that um over the course of interacting with a variety of people from different places i must have picked up some of their uh speech patterns and so i don't i know i don't talk well from what i remember i don't really talk super similarly to some of the people I know who are from Woodbridge i think most of the basics are are pretty similar to how we go about pronouncing things i think i don't use some of the vocabulary some of them use like uh cater-corner to to say diagonal [S2: mhm] um i don't use that my my parents still do on occasion and and some people i know from Woodbridge will use it but i personally will just say oh that's

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diagonal [S2: <LAUGH> yeah] um but i think a lot of most of the terminology i probably say like saying oh that's a midway or something like that um it's it's pretty or uh like this median or all that is is pretty similar to what a lot of people and how a lot of them would talk i think just my um tone in some ways might be a bit different but i don't think it's anything too major although i haven't spoken with somebody who is like really from Woodbridge in quite some time cause cause these days the only time i go over to Woodbridge is to visit my grandmother and she's not from there [S2: oh okay] so um for the most part the the my interactions with people from Woodbridge have stopped since my middle school yeah since since middle school pretty much

S2: do you think you could go back there and you would stand out with how you talk or do you think people would just see you as one of the regulars there

S1: i think i_i feel like i might to some extent just given that you know they were trying to say um i i guess if they were trying to say certain things like you know if they used cater-corner and i'm gonna be like oh you mean diagonal or if if um i guess some of the the (0:20:00) vocabulary i use they kind of assume that i'm not um it's it's it's kind of like um stereotypical things that sometime happen where where you_i don't wanna just say like more educated cause that's not exactly educated but you talk in a way that people perceive as more educated [S2: mhm] y- i'll sometimes get the sort of idea that oh you're like speaking white or something like that and and that kind of thing can sometimes cause it for them to to go like oh you must not be from here to some extent cause it's cause it's like why would you be talking in that way or you know be interested in these certain topics um you get that kind of assumption and because a good amount of the people from there will talk a bit more aggressively less passively that i do at times um

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and and then sometimes that can lead to um the appearance that i might not be from there <HN LAUGH> but i can't think of and maybe i'm just like too close to Woodbridge in some ways and Dumfries and that kind of area cause they're very_ they're right to each other so they have the same kind of vocabulary and and speech patterns that i i don't really know if i can think of any particular way of speaking that they have where i can say oh i don't do that anymore other than just that one word i think a lot of the ways we pronounce kinda certain words that aunt and then some stuff like that [S2: mhm] are are is the same like you know everybody i know says oh that's my aunt they don't say like aunt and yeah so so as far as like vocal or vowel kind of differences i think that the_my vowel usage is is the same more or less i think maybe a few words here and there might be a bit different but generally you know they go_ they uh_i would be saying it in the same way and if i didn't for a one or two words they would just probably go oh you need to say it this way [S2: right] and and i don't think it would go too far into them going oh you must not be from here [S2: mhm]

S2: um you were mentioning how people might say oh you're speaking that way you're speaking White growing up did you ever felt any linguistic insecurities about your linguistic identity or that somehow you didn't fit in with where you grew up linguistically

S1: um yes to some extent especially in middle school and in some parts in high school where you know i'd be talking to somebody and then guess i'd sound intelligent to them it's it's kind of like that stereotypical backhanded compliment kind of thing [S2: mhm] where it's like oh you talk well or speak well [S2: <LAUGH> yeah] um and and the_speak well compared to what and what do you mean i speak well i'm just talking and so so i'd get that on occasion or you know i'm talking White or you know and the and the

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kind of thing where in some ways it's an attempt to belittle you for speaking in some way that they view as uh more intelligent or or better in some kind of [S2: mhm] arbitrary sense um and and so that did definitely cause me to feel in some ways that i wasn't connected to some of the other people um and and you'd get that same thing on occasion with like answering questions where it's like wow why are you trying to act White and like you do you're trying to do well essentially [S2: mhm] it's this characterization of uh Whiteness as being trying harder in school or being more intelligent or or whatnot or being more educated and Blackness as not being any of those things which were being perpetuated mostly by other Black people (0:25:00) I knew for the most part there was very few times where somebody who wasn't Black who would kind of push this narrative um so yeah it very much isolating in many ways where it felt like i wasn't able to relate to them [S2: right] in in some ways

S2: and now you live in Norfolk

S1: i am in Norfolk right now for uh school specifically uh when i'm not here i go back to Dumfries

S2: oh okay do you find that you fit in more here than um where you grew up or how how has this city been different for you

S1: i would say that in some ways i might um well linguistically i would say that i probably fit in more here but it might just be because i'm kind of in a bubble by mostly being on campus [S2: mhm] because when i'm in Dumfries i i don't um talk to that many people uh most of the people who i am uh as as usual i don't talk to anymore maybe just like one person and that still goes fine but she talks differently than i do she'll use more African American Vernacular English than i do [S2: mhm] and so_i mean the

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communication is still pretty easy but it like very much seems like we're from different places um although we're basically from the same place and_but but i wouldn't say that it's it's due to people from from Dumfries and Woodbridge speaking uh AAVE a lot i i would say some people do especially if they're like kind of closer to DC or go to DC more often [S2: mhm] then it like shows up more um just like speech that's characterized as more aggressive in certain ways but um i think i probably fit in more here just because i spent at this point most of my time here and when i'm at home i don't really talk to many people other than some of my family and and since they're not even exactly from_well they have lived there for a long time so that goes into it but they're not from like Woodbridge they're from kind of Virginia though [S2: mhm] so that does go into me feeling more attached to her linguistically than there at this point i guess i just feel more comfortable and at ease in conversation like i'm not thinking as much about how i'm saying things [S2: right]

S2: um do you_well culturally do you notice a lot of difference between here and Woodbridge

S1: um yeah i'd say so there's a lot more people walking around at night here for sure just like in neighborhoods and stuff like that [S2: mhm] there's a downtown that's like a hub and that certainly doesn't exist in Dumfries or Woodbridge really um you have more of a um kind of cultural identity as far as the arts being here and theaters and places to do stuff with writing and and like acting and anything like that you have a lot more of that going on here [S2: mhm] areas like or like clubs and stuff like that you have more of a_i don't know kind of group identity in a way and of course there's like the naval base and so then you have a lot of that presence and and Woodbridge has quite a few military people but

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like you don't have a- any kind of base there [S2: right] so it's not super o- openly a thing like you might see a few people in in uniform here and there um but for the most part you don't really notice it so it's definitely more of a thing here culturally uh another thing i would say is (0:30:00) you see more people in Dumfries and Woodbridge openly carrying guns mostly White people than here [S2: mhm] at least i haven't noticed many people doing it i know in Dumfries and everything sometimes you'd just have people walking around Walmart with their gun out or wherever else and yeah um yeah it's definitely not as much of a thing here to do that um i think here there might be more of a more of a i don't know negative feeling in some way about police than there just because there are so many i guess minority people in Dumfries not that there aren't a lot here too but in the way that a lot of people go around with the assumption that they don't know who i'm connected to in the way that the police won't just like treat me any kind of way cause they don't know if i'm related to some kind of higher up powerful person and i don't think that there's that same sort of conception about interactions with the police here compared to there yeah i think for the most part those are the cultural differences like there's definitely more of an impact with the arts and and um more of _pla- more places to go where you can have social interactions in Dumfries you more so keep to yourself [S2: mhm] generally you're kinda just in your household you there isn't a whole bunch of neighborly stuff like you're not gonna go see your neighbor ever you know you might pretty much never see them like you'll see them walking around with their a- dog or or whatnot but you're not going up to ask them for anything for the most part and even if you do you might get threatened when you try to so it's it's not any kind of situation where people are like super neighborly i mean generally they're decent and and

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occasionally you'll get somebody who will help you do something they feel like something unfair is going on but for the most part people keep to themselves more so there than here i think this area has a larger kind of community for people to kind of gather and and and they have more of a um open space for sexual minorities [S2: mhm] for sure um especially since this is kind of like a port area and port cities have traditionally just been better about it because people uh will ag_sexual minorities will like aggregate there and and they tend to end up being like considered gay towns or whatnot and and you can see that here with the number of gay clubs and places that have drag shows [S2: mhm] and stuff like that and you would never see that in in Dumfries that wouldn't happen you would more likely have that place get like vandalized or something like that [S2: right] um and_oh that actually reminds me there was this one time in Dumfries now that I think of it where there's this um bus for uh this one church and it was like vandalized and then somebody wrote like the N-word on it and stuff like that and and so that kinda thing happens in Dumfries sometimes too so even though usually at at least on the surface it's pretty okay um but yeah for the most part those are the differences i would say and i think here there's less of a focus on religion and to some extent i think but i'm not exactly sure if that's true that's just my um i guess view [S2: yeah]

S2: all right i hate to cut you short but i think that's all we have time for but thank you for your time and for telling us your story

S1: you're welcome