



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



Oral History Interview

with

Anthony Adams and Brenda Adams

Interviewer: Kerry Reed

Narrator: Anthony Adams and Brenda Adams

Location of Interview: Lloyd House, 220 N Washington St, Alexandria, VA 22314

Date of Interview: 03/20/2025

Transcriber: Paul BirD.C.all

Summary:

Siblings, Anthony Adams and Brenda Adams reflect on their experiences growing up in the Seminary neighborhood of Alexandria. Their deep familial roots in the area, along with their rich family history, highlight the importance of understanding one's past and the impact it has on the present day.

Note:

Throughout the interview, both narrators refer to the area they grew up in as "Mudtown." This area is also known as Seminary.

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General	Childhood; Community; African American History; Family; Neighborhood History; Education
People	Adams, Anthony Antonio; Adams, Brenda Marie; Adams, Clare Shorts; Adams, Earl Smith; Adams, Earl Smith.; Adams, Mary Thelma LeBeau; Adams, Thelma Elizabeth; Adams, Paul Christopher; Adams, Patricia Ann; Adams, Denise Theresa; Adams, George; Adams, Ada; Casey, John Wesley; Adams, Robert; Buster, James Adams; McCarver, McCargo Bah , Char; Patterson, Lillian; Burchell, Donald; Goldberg, Arnold; Lexus, Lindsey Callick; Wanzer, Goldie

Places	T.C. Williams High School; Mudtown; Episcopal High School; New Orleans, LA; Chinquapin Park and Recreation Center; G.C. Murphy's; Blessed Sacrament Roman Catholic Church; Oakland Baptist Church; Armstrong High School; Little Store; Alexandria Water Company; Carr's Beach; Bradlee Shopping Center; G.C. Murphy's; High's; Fort Ward; St. Mary's Academy; Howard University; Hopkins House; Alexandria Health Department; Minnie Howard; Felton Shopping Center; St. Joseph's Elementary School; Concerned Citizens Network; Continental Services, Inc.; Carpenter House; Northern Virginia Chapter of the National Coalition of 100 Black Women; Night Riders; Sisters of the Oblate;
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INTRODUCTION

Brenda Adams [00:00:01] Good morning. My name is Brenda Marie Adams and I'm 72 years old.

Anthony Adams [00:00:07] Good morning, my name is Anthony A. Adams Sr. and I'm 66 years old.

Kerry Reed [00:00:13] My name is Kerry James Reed. It is the 20th of March, 2025, and I am 28 years old. So, Mr. and Ms. Adams, it's a pleasure to finally get to meet y'all today. Thank you so much for coming down. I'm really looking forward to this interview. I suppose we can start with you, Ms. Adams. Where were you born?

Brenda Adams [00:00:30] I was born in Alexandria, Virginia.

Kerry Reed [00:00:35] Alexandria, Virginia.

Brenda Adams [00:00:36] Alexandria Hospital, which I think was located on.....

Anthony Adams [00:00:39] Duke Street.

Brenda Adams [00:00:39] Duke Street or Duke Street?

Kerry Reed [00:00:40] Duke Street.

Brenda Adams [00:00:40] The old hospital from years ago.

Kerry Reed [00:00:46] And I'm going to assume that you were born there as well, Mr. Adams?

Anthony Adams [00:00:49] That's correct.

HISTORY OF THE ADAMS FAMILY HOME

Kerry Reed [00:00:53] And I'm sorry, which one is older? My mistake. So, what did your house look like Ms. Adams?

Brenda Adams [00:01:04] Now, do you want me to explain what the old house looked like that was there or the house that's currently there now?

Kerry Reed [00:01:10] The old house that you grew up in please.

Brenda Adams [00:01:11] The old house we grew up in, was a house that my father built along with a gentleman from Bailey's Crossroads, they built the house. It was a red house, small red house, set up off the ground, I think on cinder blocks or something like that. And it was three rooms and a bathroom, three huge rooms and a bathroom.

Kerry Reed [00:01:37] You wouldn't happen to know the name of the person that helped your father build the house, do you, Mr. Adams?

Anthony Adams [00:01:42] Not at all.

Kerry Reed [00:01:45] So, three big rooms. Did you all share a room growing up, Mr. Adams?

Brenda Adams [00:01:50] Yes. The house will....sorry

Kerry Reed [00:01:52] It's okay.

Anthony Adams [00:01:54] The boys had one room and the sisters in the other room.

Kerry Reed [00:01:59] And I'm sorry, did you say it was ranch style or?

Brenda Adams [00:02:01] It was ranch style. It wasn't a big house.

Kerry Reed [00:02:06] Ranch style. And then, Mr. Adams, when did you know or when were you told that you were living in Mudtown, in Seminary?

Anthony Adams [00:02:18] Oh, growing up, heard it all the time, it was a nickname.

HISTORY OF MUDTOWN

Kerry Reed [00:02:22] So when do you think, when was your first realization that Mudtown was different or unique from the rest of Alexandria?

Anthony Adams [00:02:31] I didn't. I just noticed that they call it a mud town because back in the day it was like, when it would rain it was muddy.

Kerry Reed [00:02:38] Mm, okay. What about you, Ms. Adams? When did you know that you were living in Mudtown?

Brenda Adams [00:02:50] Well, pretty much the same as Anthony said, but we heard our relatives and the older people talk, say Mudtown ever since we were little. We hear some of them say that. And for the same reasons, when it rained, it was a lot of gravel roads, they weren't paved roads like they are now, mostly gravel, rocks, and dirt.

Kerry Reed [00:03:14] Interesting, so what, what kind.....Please.

Brenda Adams [00:03:21] And when I say that, I don't mean the main road. Main road was probably cobblestone and gravel to Quaker Lane, because it was just two lanes, one this way and one that way. But, when you came off of Quaker Lane into the neighborhoods that we're talking about, it was mostly gravel and dirt.

Kerry Reed [00:03:36] Okay, so you said neighborhoods that you were talking about, in your mind I guess or your recollection, how big was Mudtown?

Brenda Adams [00:03:46] It was pretty big. I mean, it covered all the way up to Quaker Lane, and it covered all the way just about to Chinguapin, and out toward King Street, and out toward Bishopland, not Bishop, but you know, up against where T.C. is today, that fencing area. So, there were a lot of houses scattered around in there, and it was a Black neighborhood.

Anthony Adams [00:04:09] And, you can also take it far as to Braddock too, from King Street and Braddock. And it goes, like my sister said, towards the end of Chinguapin, going down King Street, and also a little bit on Braddock Road.

Kerry Reed [00:04:23] Okay, so Chinguapin to Braddock is roughly the extent of it. And then Quaker Lane, two lanes, cobblestones you said?

Brenda Adams [00:04:34] It wasn't paved like it is today, so it's probably cobblestone.

Kerry Reed [00:04:39] So, which side of Quaker Lane did y'all live on, Mr. Adams?

Anthony Adams [00:04:44] Okay, if you're going north on Quaker Lane, we'd be on the left. If you're coming down south, down the hill, we'd be on right.

Kerry Reed [00:04:57] And then Mr. Adams, was it common for a lot of people to build their homes in Mudtown?

Anthony Adams [00:05:02] Uh, yes.

Kerry Reed [00:05:06] Were they all the same style as yours?

Anthony Adams [00:05:09] No, sir. Different.

Kerry Reed [00:05:10] Okay. How so?

Anthony Adams [00:05:14] Brick, wood, some of them had siding, tin siding I would call it.

Kerry Reed [00:05:23] Tin siding.

Anthony Adams [00:05:24] Tin siding.

Kerry Reed [00:05:25] Interesting.

Anthony Adams [00:05:25] Yes.

Kerry Reed [00:05:26] All right, just a second.

Anthony Adams [00:05:28] And you see that more down south now when you go back.

Kerry Reed [00:05:37] I'm very interested in Mudtown, because I've never done an interview with anybody who's grown up there. So, I was hoping that you all could describe a little more of the neighborhood for me, if that would be okay? What it looked like or anything like that.

Brenda Adams [00:05:52] The neighborhood was mostly across from what is now the Episcopal High School and Virginia Theological Seminary. It's on the opposite side of Quaker Lane. That's on one side and we're on the other. So growing up, the houses were, they were scattered around, it was a lot of woodsy areas around there. Sometimes, we would say things like, 'Oh we're going down the lane', you know? Actually, that was a cut through the woods and down this little gravel rocky road into relative's houses that were scattered around in there. Most of the houses were similar. Some were two story. Some were just one story. I remember growing up, there was a creek that ran, when we say down the lane, down in that area there was a creek, that ran down through there up a little hill and most people didn't have plumbing, indoor plumbing. We had well water. In fact, we used to get, when I was little, I remember my brother saying, we got our water from one of our cousins, Will, that lived back up in that area where the creek was. Charlie Boy, we called him.

Kerry Reed [00:07:12] Charlie Boy.

Brenda Adams [00:07:13] He was a Wanzer.

Kerry Reed [00:07:15] Okay.

Brenda Adams [00:07:17] And most people did not have indoor plumbing. We had an indoor bathroom, but it was really, what I remember, it was really just a hole in the floor where people

would, and I think they had a truck that came around and picked up waste back in those days. And, our house, between our house, my grandmother's house was right at Quaker Lane up front. And, it's still there to this day, the new house. And our house was down from that. And most of that property in between, was Adam's property. So, her house was on the corner, my grandmother's house, which my cousins, my aunt and uncle lived there with their kids. Ours was down the lane, I don't want to say lane, because I'm confused with that other lane. Ours was down a road. A little dirt road. Rocky dirt road. Our house was there, and in between there was nothing, but woods, trees and we grew up with all kinds of plum trees, apple trees, pear trees, berry trees and my father had a garden on both sides, so we grew a lot of our own vegetables. My mother used to can vegetables. And then, if you went over, down this path, you could go to some of the other neighbor houses down through there. Like the Wanzers, the Roys, and they were all relatives. The Roys were definitely relatives of ours, and some of the Wanzers too. And most people were very friendly. I mean, people took care of their kids, took care their kids and yours. In those days, it was nothing for a neighbor to say, 'You know your mother wouldn't want you doing this or your father wouldn't what you doing this. You better go home, because I'm going to tell your parents.'

Kerry Reed [00:09:17] Naturally.

Brenda Adams [00:09:18] So, they took care each other. And in those days, it was so safe too, that you never had to lock doors. You could leave your doors open, didn't have to worry about your kids. We could go off in the woods, and play, and no one worried about us, because we were all going to come back home. And, we played with the other kids in the neighborhood. So, that was kind of the set up there, and then there were houses along Quaker Lane too. Like the Garvins were on Quaker lane, the Woods, and others. Now, I wanted to, bringing you up to date, and this was back probably in the fifties. Late forties, early fifties. In I guess the sixties, early sixties, when they redid that whole neighborhood here.

Kerry Reed [00:10:07] Yeah.

Brenda Adams [00:10:10] Our family home is still in the same place. My grandmother, aunt and uncle's home is still in same place at the corner, but there are now three houses in between that, where there used to be just us and our aunts at the corner. So, that's an interesting little tidbit, that they were able to build three more houses in that area of land.

MEMORIES OF MUDTOWN

Kerry Reed [00:10:36] Mr. Adams, what was your favorite place in the neighborhood growing up?

Anthony Adams [00:10:41] in the woods.

Kerry Reed [00:10:42] In the woods?

Anthony Adams [00:10:44] I was like a young mountain boy. I stayed in the woods all the time. All the animals was my friends.

Kerry Reed [00:10:54] Absolutely. So, it's interesting to me that your sister mentioned lots of greenery, vegetables, you know, all these different sorts of fruit trees. I'm interested in the gardens though. Please.

Anthony Adams [00:11:10] Let me go in further. When my parents or brothers and sisters looked for me, they just hollered out most of the time about being one of the trees, because you can go up there and get apples and just never wash and wipe it off on your shirt, dirty shirt, and just eat them and plum trees the same way. And that's the way we lived. We didn't have to worry about candy and fruit, I mean, candy and sweets, because we had all that sweet vegetables and fruit. And also, my brother, my late brother Paul, we all tried to build a little treehouse, you know, just put boards, that's what it was, so you can be up on the trees in between the branches. And, I used to be up there and playing with the dogs.

Kerry Reed [00:11:59] Absolutely. So, I'm interested in the gardens. So, did everybody in the neighborhood have a garden?

Anthony Adams [00:12:07] Mostly did, in their backyards, on their land, and we also had one in our yard. Two of them, right? Yeah, two big ones.

Kerry Reed [00:12:17] Two big ones? What sort of vegetables were grown in your gardens?

Brenda Adams [00:12:23] My father, he would grow string beans, potatoes, tomatoes. Just all kinds of things, and other types of greens, carrots, and his favorite was beets.

Kerry Reed [00:12:39] Beets, really?

Brenda Adams [00:12:40] Beets, and turnips. Oh, and cucumbers.

Kerry Reed [00:12:45] Cucumbers. Wow.

Anthony Adams [00:12:47] And another.....

Brenda Adams [00:12:48] Corn.

Anthony Adams [00:12:50] And, another type of greens, you know, he had two different types of greens. You know, the lettuce and my mother brought back from her hometown of New Orleans,

Louisiana, or I would say Baton Rouge, a fig tree, that my father planted. And we also had figs and she used to, like my sister said earlier, she used to can the figs.

Kerry Reed [00:13:20] So, I would imagine with all these fresh vegetables and fruits, y'all's dinners must have been extravagant and gorgeous.

Anthony Adams [00:13:28] Oh yes.

Brenda Adams [00:13:28] You know, my mother was an excellent cook. She was from New Orleans, she was Creole, and so we ate a lot of Creole and Cajun food in [inaudible]. And, one of my least favorite type of vegetable, if you want to call it that, was okra. So, you can see some of my roots were definitely Virginia, because I wasn't crazy about the okra that she would cook, a lot for gumbos and things like that.

Kerry Reed [00:13:57] Got it, got it. So could you both tell me the favorite meal that your mother would prepare?

Anthony Adams [00:14:02] Well.....

Brenda Adams [00:14:03] Chicken gumbo.

Kerry Reed [00:14:04] Chicken gumbo.

Anthony Adams [00:14:05] Chicken gumbo was good, but I ate everything. Certain parts, certain meals, my siblings didn't eat. I loved beans. I can eat beans five, six nights a week. To this day, I still eat beans.

Brenda Adams [00:14:20] And some of her other favorites, she was a good baker too. She baked excellent pies and cakes. And she was excellent at frying chicken, too. And my father was excellent in preparing a ham.

Kerry Reed [00:14:38] So, I'm interested in the layout of the house then, because I can only imagine these smells just wafting through the house as y'all were growing up. So, when you first entered the door of your home, where was the kitchen located?

Brenda Adams [00:14:49] Right on the front.

Kerry Reed [00:14:50] Right on front.

Brenda Adams [00:14:51] We're talking the old home, not the one that's there now, the old one that was right there. And, it wasn't really a kitchen, it was just an area with a wood-burning stove. And, that's where a lot of the cooking was done.

Kerry Reed [00:15:03] Sounds fabulous. I'm gonna need a second breakfast, oh my word.

Brenda Adams [00:15:08] And coal burning.

Kerry Reed [00:15:09] Coal burning as well. So there are two stoves or just?

Brenda Adams [00:15:12] Well, it was that one that was for cooking, and then there was another one out in that bigger open area. And these houses, I mean, you know, there were eight kids and my parents, so there were ten of us. And, this was a very small house, so the quarters were very close. In the bigger room, it served as, where the kitchen was, the bigger area, it served as a dining room, living room, and also served at the back of that same room, like a bedroom, where my parents were. And, I remember my other brother and I sharing a bed by the back door. Paul. I'd sleep at one end, he slept at the other end, and I remember the bathroom being at the end right there, or what we call the bathroom. And then, there was another room, off the big room, was where the older ones slept. My two older brothers and my older sister. And then, Anthony came along in 1958 and he was there as well and my sisters.

Anthony Adams [00:16:21] And then, I was sharing the bed with my brother. He slept at one end, I slept at the other end. But, I came along and, as my sister said, the house was warm. And, there was always room to me, because everybody worked. The older brothers worked. And my parents would go out and I would be outside. We played outside. It ain't like the kids today, staying inside watching TV and playing Nintendo. We had games. We made up games.

Kerry Reed [00:16:56] Absolutely.

Brenda Adams [00:16:57] And I think partly, you know, being outside a lot because of close quarters like that, it's so close that you want to be out. And I think, and it was so nice to be out. It was so safe. We stayed outdoors and played a lot.

Anthony Adams [00:17:09] To dark.

Kerry Reed [00:17:12] So, what were some games that y'all would play?

Brenda Adams [00:17:14] Oh, hide-and-go-seek. Tag. What is that little? Hopscotch, double-dutch, jump rope, baseball.

Anthony Adams [00:17:25] Baseball.

Kerry Reed [00:17:26] Hmm.

Anthony Adams [00:17:29] Kickball and throwing the football back and forth.

Kerry Reed [00:17:32] Okay.

Brenda Adams [00:17:33] And basketball. We would go down by Chinquapin [Park & Recreation Center] and play basketball. And we played dolls. Of course, Anthony wasn't involved with that. My cousin and I would play dolls all the time and that kind of thing.

Kerry Reed [00:17:47] Right. Right.

Anthony Adams [00:17:48] But, I do remember cutting the hair. Taking the pair of scissors and cutting the hair off her doll baby and my cousin's. And I was in trouble for that. But, we also, my father taught us a lot of outdoor things. Definitely. I grew up learning things about outdoors. How to make bow and arrows, how to make kites out of paper. And, you take a handkerchief or old tie, he might have you shred it and that would be the tail for the kite. He even taught me how to make a tomahawk, or what you call a hatchet. And mostly, it was just a sharp piece of wood tied around a stick with twine, like the Indians did. And, I learned a lot of outdoor skills, even to this day.

Brenda Adams [00:18:35] And to add to that, my father made a swing in the backyard for us. We'd have a swing with a board, we'd have swing with a tire.

Anthony Adams [00:18:42] Big old truck tire.

Brenda Adams [00:18:44] And, he used to play games with us. I know when we were little, he would take us outside and he'd build a tent. And, we'd actually spend the night outside in the tent. I was scared to death, but. And so, he would do things like that, just fun things to put together.

Kerry Reed [00:18:58] Of course.

Brenda Adams [00:19:00] But, an interesting point before I forget, when we were young also. My mother used to take us on the bus, down here on King Street. I don't know if you, well you probably wouldn't remember. There's a store there. I think it's called, it's a Gap now, it may be gone. It may a sunglasses or eyeglasses store now. But, it used to be Lerner's, which was a department store. And, there's a balcony out there. And during the Christmas holiday, my mother used to take us down there. And we, it was cold, and we'd be out on King Street waiting for Santa Claus to come out on the balcony. That was like an annual thing that I recall. I always remember that.

Kerry Reed [00:19:38] Of course.

Anthony Adams [00:19:41] Also, I remember coming out of Old Town with my mom. Most of the time with the younger kids with my mother, coming at AB&W Bus. The 6J. And going to the sandwich shop. I think it was, Murphy's?

Brenda Adams [00:20:01] G.C. Murphy's.

Anthony Adams [00:20:03] Murphy's, and they had a counter, and I didn't really pay attention. Young kid. We couldn't sit at the counter, but if nobody was there, we can sit there. But, if a white come in, we would stand up. And, it didn't bother me, I'd like to just eat the hot dog and get the soda and the french fries, and I remember that part. And, that's the day, you know? The mind in the city, over down south, but it didn't even faze me. You know, as a kid, my mother and parents probably knew all that, and father, but the kids, you know, wasn't no big thing.

Brenda Adams [00:20:48] Kids are usually happy wherever they went.

Kerry Reed [00:20:50] Naturally.

Anthony Adams [00:20:50] Yeah, that's right.

Kerry Reed [00:20:58] So, you've discussed, both of you have discussed you know, playing with your cousins and then your grandmother's house was nearby as well. And I was curious, can you all remember the neighbors that you had?

Brenda Adams [00:21:09] Sure.

Anthony Adams [00:21:09] Oh, yeah.

Brenda Adams [00:21:11] We had, there was a lady, she was a cousin of ours. Her name was Goldie Wanzer. We called her Cousin Goldie.

Anthony Adams [00:21:18] Cousin Goldie.

Brenda Adams [00:21:18] You had, you know, names came out slang when you were young.

Kerry Reed [00:21:23] Naturally, yeah.

Brenda Adams [00:21:24] To pronounce more so. We called her Cousin Goldie. But, her name was Goldie Wanzer. I mentioned to you Charlie Boy, who lived up on the hill where we got well water from. He was Wanzer also. The Roys lived over in that area. I'm kin to the Roys. My grandmother was a Roy. So, you had houses along there. I remember Virginia Roy, she was married to a Wanzer. God, there's so many houses back up there. Norma Roy.

Anthony Adams [00:22:01] Smith Roy.

Brenda Adams [00:22:02] Smith Roy. My parents stayed there at one time, when they first came up here from, when my father got out of the service in here. I remember when they first came up here, I think they stayed with our, Smith Roy, who was my father's uncle. And let's see, there were the Diggsses, the Diggs, they were there, back up in there. I don't know when they came, but they were back up in there. The Woods. Douglas Wood Sr. and his family. There were some Johnsons back over there. And this is just in the little Mud Town area, along on King Street, we've had other relatives, you know, it kind of all blended in. You had the Caseys that lived on King street, and up at Fort Ward, the Belks and Caseys up at Fort Ward. And the Youngs, they were at Fort Ward, and we're talking pre-seminary when they built it up.

Kerry Reed [00:23:15] Yeah. So, you keep on referencing the old and the new, just for clarification for the interview and for myself, when was that change in your mind?

Brenda Adams [00:23:25] In the sixties, early sixties, when they decided to do that urban renewal up on that end. So, a lot of those places were either condemned or just destroyed, because they were building new houses there and they were making room for that school. So, and they we're doing the same thing up at Fort Ward. So, a lot the folks at Fort Ward, some of them were able to buy houses in that neighborhood. Like the Belks, the Youngs. I think and the Caseys, I believe. Where the Casey and Belks were related to Caseys. They were Caseys as well. So, they were able to buy into that neighborhood. And then, there were some others from downtown Alexandria that were able to buy in that neighborhood. The Atkins.

Kerry Reed [00:24:07] Yep.

Anthony Adams [00:24:10] That's the new.

Brenda Adams [00:24:11] That's the new neighborhood. They were able to buy in the new neighborhood.

Kerry Reed [00:24:14] Okay.

Brenda Adams [00:24:16] Then you had folks some of the ones on King Street stayed on King Street.

Kerry Reed [00:24:20] Okay.

Anthony Adams [00:24:23] Then the old, you had the Shorts up at Fort Ward. You had the Martins, that was on King Street. Lewis, another set of Lewises, which are kin to us also. They was in Seminary also, on what they call Mudtown, and also on the Braddock Road area. The Butlers, the Henrys and the Kings. And it was two sets of Martins. And that's in the neighborhood. But, if you go further out past Bishop Lane and Key Drive, I had white friends. I see we're gonna get to that, but I went to school with them at the Catholic schools. And I had a lot of white friends. The McGees. He was a priest or a bishop at the church right on the corner of Quaker and Seminary Road off Janney's Lane. And also on Janney's Lane, down on Deanery Drive. And the Scotts. And the Carols, which was very good friends of the family. I think half my family went to school with the family, and their father was a doctor at the time. One of the best doctors I ever seen, I had.

Kerry Reed [00:26:04] Absolutely.

Anthony Adams [00:26:06] Then you go down, Bishop Lane and I had friends down in that area too. The Kellys and stuff like that. We had really a part of, my family and another family had a part of being on both sides, because we went to Catholic schools for one part and then switched over. So, I .. playing, we all played together anyway, it wasn't a big deal. We all played on the football field or on the, up in the principal high school.

Kerry Reed [00:26:37] Yeah.

Anthony Adams [00:26:37] And even as a kid, we used to go through there, play army and playing at the pond. They had a pond. We played and swam there during the summer, and in the winter time, we skated across it. But, we had our shoes and just slide across, and some of the principal high school students were coming out with ice skates and skating.

Kerry Reed [00:27:01] Wow. So, it seems like, correct me if I'm wrong, Mr. Adams, but that y'all were kin to a lot of your neighbors.

Anthony Adams [00:27:11] Seventy-five or seventy percent of it was kin.

Kerry Reed [00:27:12] Oh wow.

Anthony Adams [00:27:14] The story was, growing up, my father said, 'You know, watch who you date, because it might be your kin.'

Kerry Reed [00:27:22] Yeah.

Brenda Adams [00:27:24] Yeah, I was going to say, we were related to a lot of the folks there, and the Adams family goes back to the 1700s. We're one of the oldest families in that area, dating pre-Civil War. A lot of folks married into the Adams Family and vice versa. And, that's how we're kin to the Caseys, that's how we're kin to some of the Wanzers, that's how we're kin to the.... Lilithses?

FAMILY RELIGIOUS HISTORY

Kerry Reed [00:27:58] Absolutely. So, you've mentioned church a couple times now. What church did y'all attend?

Anthony Adams [00:28:06] We attended bless the sight well, let me put it this way.

Brenda Adams [00:28:11] You want me to take the history before that?

Anthony Adams [00:28:13] Yeah, take the history before that.

Brenda Adams [00:28:14] We date back even further than that, in terms of what I think he was getting ready to say, Blessed Sacrament [Roman Catholic Church]. When we were growing up, my two older, my three older siblings and myself, we went to St. Joseph's Catholic school right at Columbus Street, and we also went to Saint Joseph's Church, and that was a Black Catholic church. I was there for first grade, and the others went there through eighth grade, and then on to Parker-Gray, the three older ones. And, by the time we went to Blessed Sacrament, it was myself, my other brother Paul, and Landon, who was one of the older ones, my parents decided to put this up at Blessed Sacrament. And there were, Lee Young, he was one Sergeant Young's children. And I think, that the only other Blacks that were there was Carolyn Francis Johnson. They may have came the same year or after, but we integrated Blessed Sacrament Catholic School and Church back in the late fifties, because I think I was in first grade there in fifty-nine. Fifty-eight, fifty-nine. And, that's a tidbit that probably people don't really know.

Kerry Reed [00:29:30] No, I had no idea.

Brenda Adams [00:29:31] And then, Anthony came along for first grade. Paul was there. Paul came along first for kindergarten. And then, Anthony, a couple of years after that. And we, myself, I went through there all the way through eighth grade and then to St. Mary's Academy on Russell Road. And then on to Howard University. And the younger ones were at Blessed Sacrament for a long period of time, and then they went on, and I'll let him talk about that. But, I have been a member of Blessed Sacrament Catholic Parish for over sixty-something years. Today over sixty, at least sixty-five years. That has been my church.

Anthony Adams [00:30:18] And I attended Blessed Sacrament from first up until like fourth. And then, I went to public schools. And then from there, they started bussin' kids. We had a school right next to our house. You can walk from here across the street and be at TC [Williams High School]. And I bussed to GW [George Washington High School] for two years.

Kerry Reed [00:30:44] Hmm, okay.

Anthony Adams [00:30:46] And also middle school, I went to Minnie Howard. Oh, I forgot about Blessed, um MacArthur. So, you know, I was just, after I left Blessed Sacrament, I went to like four other schools.

Brenda Adams [00:30:59] And the younger siblings did too. The two daughters, girls, younger than Anthony, who also went to Blessed Sacrament until probably third, fourth grade, and then they went to public schools.

Kerry Reed [00:31:12] So, what was the reason that y'all were attending Catholic school?

Brenda Adams [00:31:17] Because my mother was Catholic, you know, most people, most Blacks coming out of New Orleans and...

Anthony Adams [00:31:23] The parish.

Brenda Adams [00:31:24] They were Catholics, so my, that was part of the, I think back in those days it was probably part of the marriage thing, that the kids would be raised Catholic in agreement. So, we were all raised Catholic initially. And my mother was Catholic, my father was Baptist.

Kerry Reed [00:31:40] Mm, okay. So, before... because your father grew up around here.

Brenda Adams [00:31:49] Yes.

Kerry Reed [00:31:50] Okay, I just wanted to get that straight in my mind. Did he attend Alfred Street Baptist Church or?

Anthony Adams [00:31:56] No.

Kerry Reed [00:31:56] No.

Brenda Adams [00:31:56] He was a member of Oakland Baptist Church on King Street. In fact, one of our ancestors, Clare Shorts Adams, is a founding member of that church. One of the founding members.

Anthony Adams [00:32:07] One of the founding members. She's in the top three.

Kerry Reed [00:32:10] Wow. Wow.

Brenda Adams [00:32:11] And, he didn't go to school here in the city too. Because back then, it was segregated where my father grew up. So he went to school in Washington, D.C.

Kerry Reed [00:32:20] Yeah. Got it.

Brenda Adams [00:32:23] Armstrong High School is one of the ones.

BLACK BUSINESSES IN MUDTOWN

Kerry Reed [00:32:31] Mr. Adams, were there any Black businesses in Mudtown while you were growing up?

Anthony Adams [00:32:37] They had businesses like the Garvins. They had their like hauling business or trash business. We had a couple of brick masons that had, you know, they did side jobs, but they were their own business. And if I'm not mistaken, one of the ladies did hair.

Kerry Reed [00:32:59] Okay.

Anthony Adams [00:33:01] Beautician area. And that was about it. I do remember stores being ran. The store we used to go to on Braddock Road was, we called it the Little Store. I heard some of the older people call it Johnson's Store.

Brenda Adams [00:33:17] It was called Little John's.

Anthony Adams [00:33:18] Little John's, something like that.

Brenda Adams [00:33:20] It was mostly the Little Store.

Anthony Adams [00:33:21] Yeah, Little Store. And the owner was a former colonel in World War II, and when he married a Korean lady, he brought some of her family. And they ran the store, so we got along good. I used to work around there as a kid, as a little kid. Probably as young as eight, nine years old picking up things and they pay you and it was really nice

Kerry Reed [00:33:44] Got it.

Brenda Adams [00:33:44] It's now a big nursery. You probably see it on Braddock Road, across from that gas station, across from that Shell Gas Station. It's a nursery.

Kerry Reed [00:33:54] Oh, that's what that is.

Brenda Adams [00:33:56] We used to call that the Apple House.

Anthony Adams [00:33:57] Apple House, right.

Kerry Reed [00:33:58] Okay.

Brenda Adams [00:33:59] That's what it used to be called, the Apple House

Anthony Adams [00:34:00] He had like the Apple House on one side, and then on the other side, it was like a store, where you see a cleaner set now. That's what they called it the Little Store. But, you can still buy candy for a penny.

Brenda Adams [00:34:15] You were asking too, how was it growing up there and I can remember, you know, we didn't have a lot of money.

Kerry Reed [00:34:21] Mm-hmm. Yeah.

Brenda Adams [00:34:22] But, we had a lot happiness.

Kerry Reed [00:34:23] Of course.

Anthony Adams [00:34:23] Yes.

Brenda Adams [00:34:23] But, when they were building that school, and I'm only saying this because it's in that time period that you were mentioning, a lot of the workers over there would drink sodas and they would leave their bottles. And my brother Paul and them, we'd go over there, and Anthony, he's pretty young, but we would go over there and we'd collect the bottles, because they were worth two cents.

Kerry Reed [00:34:43] Yeah.

Brenda Adams [00:34:43] And, we would take them over to the Little Store, cash them in, and buy penny candy.

Anthony Adams [00:34:50] And you'd be surprised, how many bottles you add up, because you had a lot of people working at the whole school. I mean, you can get almost like four dollars a day.

Kerry Reed [00:35:02] Oh wow.

Anthony Adams [00:35:03] Them guys drank three to four sodas a day.

Kerry Reed [00:35:04] From two-cent cans, four dollars?

Anthony Adams [00:35:06] Yeah, no bottles. We had to go make three trips.

Kerry Reed [00:35:09] Oh, wow.

Anthony Adams [00:35:10] Three or four dollars. Somewhere around that.

Brenda Adams [00:35:12] So, we were little entrepreneurs.

Kerry Reed [00:35:14] Sounds like y'all had a business of your own.

Brenda Adams [00:35:16] We had our own business. We would collect the bottles and take them to the store and cash them in.

Kerry Reed [00:35:21] That's fabulous. So, what that question was leading to, is because you mentioned that, I forget the name of the doctor, but the one that was living in your neighborhood.

Anthony Adams [00:35:33] Dr. Carols.

Kerry Reed [00:35:34] Dr. Carols. Yes.

Brenda Adams [00:35:35] Well, he didn't live in our neighborhood. He lived on Quaker Lane, off of Sterling.

Kerry Reed [00:35:39] Off Sterling, okay. My mistake.

Brenda Adams [00:35:41] But, he kind of came a little bit later though.

Anthony Adams [00:35:44] Yeah, he came later, but I'm saying that we used to walk around, it seemed like everything was our neighborhood, because we could just walk anywhere. Like today, you can't walk to certain places, or even back in the day you couldn't walk to certain places. But, the people in the marriage I named, I started working for when I was ten or eleven years old, just pulling weeds in their garden and pushing a little push mower and they're paying for it. And, my brother Paul and I in the summer, we would do that. And in the fall we would rake leaves. And in winter we'd shovel snow.

Kerry Reed [00:36:21] Absolutely.

Brenda Adams [00:36:25] When we were talking about doctors, back in those days, I mean, I'm talking pre-1965 and 50s. My father used to see a doctor called Dr. Carpenter. I don't remember his first name. Dr. Carpenter. That was a doctor that he saw back in the day. And I know my, there was another Black, and he was a Black doctor. And there was a another Black doctor, that my relatives used to see, Dr. Lindo. He was a Black doctor. We used to do, a lot of our medical trips were to the Alexandria Health Department, that used to be on St. Asaph Street. We used to go there for our shots, for dental care, and medical care.

ADAMS FAMILY HISTORY

Kerry Reed [00:37:23] So, the question that I asked was leading into, I was curious about the professions of everybody in the neighborhood. So, just to start with your father, what did your father do?

Brenda Adams [00:37:34] My father worked for the Alexandria Water Company.

Kerry Reed [00:37:37] Water Company, okay.

Brenda Adams [00:37:38] And for many, many years. And he participated, and was very much an integral part of the piping being laid for plumbing up in Mudtown, up in that area. They ran a lot of the pipes from all the way down into those houses that I've mentioned to you, that were scattered in the back in those woody areas. A lot of plumbing was laid by him and people that worked with him for the Alexandria Water Company. He also worked for the Marriott over at Marriott Twin Bridges, right at 14th Street. I don't know if you remember that. It's gone now.

Kerry Reed [00:38:17] I don't think so.

Brenda Adams [00:38:18] It's gone now, but they used to have an ice skating ring over there too. So a lot of us kids from the neighborhood, we would go over there and ice skate. But, my father worked at that hotel. I'm not sure how many years he worked for the water company, it was quite a few.

Kerry Reed [00:38:37] Please.

Anthony Adams [00:38:38] I have a question. Not a question, but the answer to my sister. He had a crew, he was a foreman on the water company, and they made pipes all through that area. That's when the water, running water came.

Kerry Reed [00:38:50] So when did he, when was he doing that work to get all the running water to Mudtown?

Brenda Adams [00:38:56] Fifties.

Kerry Reed [00:38:56] The Fifties.

Brenda Adams [00:38:56] Fifties.

Anthony Adams [00:38:56] Early Sixties.

Brenda Adams [00:38:56] Very early sixties. Maybe up until sixty.

Kerry Reed [00:39:02] Okay. Got it. And then before we go any further, I just want to clarify some names, if that's okay?

Anthony Adams [00:39:10] Oh.

Brenda Adams [00:39:10] Sure.

Kerry Reed [00:39:11] So, your father's name was?

Kerry Reed [00:39:13] Earl Smith Adams. Senior.

Kerry Reed [00:39:15] Earl Smith Adams, Sr. Okay. Mother's name?

Anthony Adams [00:39:21] Thelma.

Brenda Adams [00:39:24] Mary Thelma LeBeau Adams.

Kerry Reed [00:39:27] Mary Thelma LeBeau?

Brenda Adams [00:39:30] LeBeau. Very Frenchy. Capital L, small e, capital B, E, A, U.

Kerry Reed [00:39:36] Got it, thank you. And then ten siblings, yes?

Brenda Adams [00:39:46] No, eight.

Kerry Reed [00:39:46] Eight siblings. Okay, can we go oldest to youngest?

Brenda Adams [00:39:50] Sure. My oldest brother's name is Earl S. Adams, Jr.

Kerry Reed [00:39:54] Naturally.

Brenda Adams [00:39:55] Yes. My oldest sister, who's deceased now, her name was Thelma Elizabeth Adams. And then, there was Landon Clifton Adams. And then there's me, Brenda Marie Adams. And then, it was Paul Christopher Adams. He's deceased. And then there's Anthony, who's sitting by me, Anthony Antonio Adams.

Kerry Reed [00:40:20] Okay, so it was Paul....

Brenda Adams [00:40:22] Christopher.

Kerry Reed [00:40:23] Christopher. Thank you.

Brenda Adams [00:40:26] And then, Anthony Antonio Adams, who is sitting next to me. Patricia Ann Adams. And, Denise Teresa Adams.

Kerry Reed [00:40:41] Patricia, and then Denise?

Brenda Adams [00:40:43] Denise Teresa.

Kerry Reed [00:40:44] Denise Teresa. Thank you. Got it. Okay, terrific. So, could you describe what your parents looked like, Mr. Adams?

Anthony Adams [00:40:56] Yes. My father was around about five [feet] nine and a half [inches]. Or so, maybe five [feet] ten [inches].

Brenda Adams [00:41:03] Five [feet] ten [inches], five [feet] eleven [inches].

Anthony Adams [00:41:05] And pretty big bones. Thick. I always looked at him as Hercules, because he had big arms, and you look at my hands and see my hands are big. My father's hand was twice as big.

Kerry Reed [00:41:17] Oh my word.

Anthony Adams [00:41:18] Yeah, his hand was so big, because he was always putting them in his pockets. Him and my uncle never wore gloves. I never seen them wear gloves. Unless, they had something when they was working with steel or something, because his hand was so big. And he was a big, healthy guy. He was also in the all-Black division, the 25th Infantry, in World War II. Back then, it was the last time they used the phrase, the Buffalo Soldiers.

Kerry Reed [00:41:46] Mm-hmm.

Anthony Adams [00:41:46] The 25th was the 10th Cavalry, and the 24th was the 9th Cavalry, but as of World War II, after World War II, they stopped it. This was 24th and 25th, and he was a Master Sergeant in the 25th Infantry. And he was a big guy.

Kerry Reed [00:42:13] Absolutely.

Brenda Adams [00:42:14] He was a handsome guy. He had dark skin, had pretty wavy hair. He was a nice looking guy.

Kerry Reed [00:42:22] Absolutely. So, 25th Infantry in the Second World War?

Anthony Adams [00:42:28] Second World War.

Kerry Reed [00:42:29] Okay, got it. And then your mother, Ms. Adam?

Brenda Adams [00:42:34] My mother was light-skinned, with Black, straight, curly hair. Pretty fine features. She was a small lady, probably about five [feet] four and a half [inches]. Probably weighed about 120 pounds. Real quiet, attractive, very quiet, and very into her kids. Very much a homebody.

Kerry Reed [00:43:02] Absolutely.

Brenda Adams [00:43:03] And a great cook.

Kerry Reed [00:43:06] 120 pounds and a great cook, huh?

Brenda Adams [00:43:07] Yeah, she was young. I have a picture of her when she was really young. She was on the thin side.

Kerry Reed [00:43:16] That's terrific. So then, did your mother stay at home for most of your childhood?

Brenda Adams [00:43:21] Yes, my mother was basically at home taking care of kids, because she had eight kids and we're not that far apart in age. But, she did do domestic day work for a couple of families in the area. At one time, the Quaker Lane Apartments, I don't know if you're familiar with those? Back in the fifties, probably in the early sixties, they were segregated. So, you had a lot of doctors and lawyers and dentists living there, and she worked for some of those families. She also worked at Blessed Sacrament, where we went to school. She cooked for the nuns and the priests on Sunday.

Kerry Reed [00:44:05] I'm sure they were thankful for it.

Brenda Adams [00:44:06] They were very thankful. They loved her cooking as much as we did.

Kerry Reed [00:44:09] Yeah, I was going to say, bring some of those pies down there with those fresh fruit. Oh man. They are eating very well. What are some of your fondest memories with your parents?

Brenda Adams [00:44:24] Years ago, and this probably dates pre-Anthony, we used to go to a beach,. My father, my mother and a couple of his friends from the water company, we'd go to beaches over in, I think, Carr's Beach. And that was a Black beach.

Kerry Reed [00:44:42] That's Maryland.

Brenda Adams [00:44:43] Yes, we'd go to the beach. So, those were fond memories. Beach trips, those kind of things.

Kerry Reed [00:44:49] Absolutely.

Anthony Adams [00:44:50] I remember myself, because I remember we also went to Sandy Point, and some of his friends that used to go with their family, wives and kids, was some of their buddies that worked on the water company. And, some of the cousins, used to go to the beach, and also I used to enjoy walking through the woods. That's why I said, I feel like a nature person and survivalist, because he's teaching me things that he learned in the military. About the water, the different plants, and how you can look at certain animals and see if they were poison. That's how they would tell a Black snake from a water moccasin. And also the spiders. We saw, I saw Black widows, and he said to tell me to look on their back when I saw a little diamond, that's how I would know it is poison. And also, tiger spiders. You know, he just showed me different things and how to survive. People don't know this. The honeysuckles, back in the day, probably not now because of the fertilizer and the dirty air and all, you can pull out and get liquid, juice out of it, and that could sustain you if you didn't have water. He was teaching me some of the Indian tricks that he learned when he was stationed at one point out in Fort Worth Chico, Arizona. He was trained in survival by certain Indians too. And that right there, I enjoyed and also walking through all the woods and also just learning about survival. How to start a fire with leaves and sticks. And, I still remember that today and I showed my kids, when they was kids. They are grown now.

Brenda Adams [00:46:44] I was going to say, I remember when I was really little, probably about six, seven years old, and my parents, some of my father's friends from the water company, they would come over on a Friday or Saturday night, and they'd sit outside, and they would talk, they'd play cards. Pinochle was probably one of my favorite games. They would play cards, and we kids would all just be running around the yard and playing hide and go seek and that kind of thing. So, you were asking about what kind of things that we did. Those were some of the things we did, you know, it was a big thing. And then, on Friday nights, TV night was a big night too. Even though I didn't like everything we watched, and Sunday night was the big night for TV. Watching shows like together, like The Ed Sullivan Show, Lassie or things like that. So those were fun times, and Anthony's right, we used to go out in the woods a lot and play. With the other kids in the neighborhood as well. And we played a lot, people don't really, we played lot at that Episcopal High School Theological Seminary. Even pre-Anthony, we were up there all the time. Paul and I were up there all the time. He mentioned that they had a pond up there, that you mentioned. We would go up there and play. My father would go there sometimes, and take us there to play. And we would play on that pond, which would freeze over in the winter time, and we used it to slide across and skate across. It's not there anymore, and my understanding is that somebody drowned there.

Anthony Adams [00:48:12] Yeah.

Kerry Reed [00:48:12] Mm.

Brenda Adams [00:48:12] And they drained it, and covered it. So, it's not a thing. I don't know if that's true. That's what I heard.

Anthony Adams [00:48:19] I heard it too.

Brenda Adams [00:48:20] That someone drowned, a kid drowned in there. I don't believe it was a neighborhood kid at all. But, they drowned there and since then they just cleaned it out.

Kerry Reed [00:48:33] Yeah.

Brenda Adams [00:48:34] Grassed it over and that kind of thing. But, we used to play there a lot and another thing that we used do as a family, my parents would take us when we were young, they would take us up to Bradlee Shopping Center. It wasn't called Bradlee then, but they used to have a carnival that came there, pretty much annually, and my mother would take us up there to the carnival. And, there were times when they even had live animals. I don't mean like a dog or a cat. I mean, you know, more exotic type animals. Maybe a horse or, I don't know. I want to say elephant, but I may be wrong. But, they even had live animals, and that was way long ago. They'd come there, and they'd do it right out in the parking lot there. We used to go up and run up in that shopping center all the time, because of the shops they had there. They had that G.C. Murphy's there. I think there was a High's. High's was a store, and a lot of people don't remember this, High's was a store like 7-Eleven.

Kerry Reed [00:49:35] Okay.

Brenda Adams [00:49:35] Yeah, it's sort of like 7-Eleven. So, it's a High's Store from there. We go up there also, and get candy and ice cream and that kind of thing.

Kerry Reed [00:49:41] How do you spell that?

Brenda Adams [00:49:42] H-I-G-H, just like it says, apostrophe, High's. And it was a store on the level of a 7-Eleven.

Kerry Reed [00:49:50] Got it. Convenience center.

Anthony Adams [00:49:52] I like to add, you said things that we used to do with our family. My father used to take us in the backyard, make a little pit, and we would roast marshmallows. That was one of the favorite things I used to like. And you didn't have to worry about mosquitoes to smoke. Keep the mosquitoes away. We didn't care about mosquitoes back there anyway. And we'd be sitting there, roasting the marshmallows with a little stick off, we'd get off a tree. He'd take his knife and cut all the bark off the brown light part, stick the marshmallow in, and he'd tell us stories. Some stories were some very good stories, and family stories, that's how we knew some of our history. And other times, when it's almost time to go to bed, he'd tell us a lot of these little scary stories, but it wasn't really scary, compared to the things you see on TV today. But something to get you, you know, eyes buck looking at him when he's talking. And then when the wind blow, or you might hear an owl, we had owls back then. And you hear someone 'Hoo, hoo.' And you look up, and you say, 'Oh, there you go.' And that was some of the things I used to like. And like my sister said, watching TV on the weekends. Wrestling was one of the favorites. The people don't even know some of their stars back now, but Bobo Brazil, and all them guys, and Bruno Sammartino. And the Sheik, you know, he's one we watched.

Kerry Reed [00:51:18] Sheik. I'm familiar with that.

Anthony Adams [00:51:19] Yeah. And, but other things, we've always watched, like my sister, Lawrence Welk, religious. Mainly Billy Graham would come on like once a month or something, just crusade. But the main thing I remember, that people don't do today, every time it's thunder and lightning, you turn the lights off in the house and you be quiet. Even a dog wouldn't bark here. We all had big dogs, German shepherds. My father had a German shepherd. And everybody just sit still and wait until the storm, but you couldn't really talk. My mother used to say, 'The Lord's talking.' And sometimes, she might tell us a Bible script or, you know, religious stuff to my father. And we just sit there, and after the storm is over, turn the lights on, or if it's in the evening, business as usual.

Brenda Adams [00:52:15] And, I think that was probably because of my mother's Catholic upbringing and her roots in New Orleans. But, she would definitely make us be quiet during a storm. We get to sit quietly.

Kerry Reed [00:52:25] That's very interesting.

Brenda Adams [00:52:26] But, also interesting about growing up, my parents used to always share stories of life, and things that happened about our relatives. And so, we got a lot of that information early on, introduced early on that kind of information about 'Your grandfather did this or your

grandmother did this. Your grandmother worked here, your grandfather did this.' My father would tell us about his father delivering the mail. He was a mailman and how he got caught up in that storm back in 1922. I think it was a Knickerbocker Storm, something like that, and he contracted pneumonia, which he died. And then, my grandmother took up the task of finishing his job and delivering mail, because she was then left with like eight, seven, eight, nine kids, if I can get the number correct. And so, my father shared all these stories with us growing up, you know, about his older brother standing up and helping to take care of the family, because he was pretty young then. So, a lot of the stories, Black families were good at teaching their children their history and showing it to you if they had it.

Anthony Adams [00:53:47] Right.

Brenda Adams [00:53:47] Bibles were a good place where they documented things, and that kind of thing. So, we learned a lot of our history just listening to our parents. And my father was famous for saying, 'Now you listen to me, because I'm going to tell you this. I'm gonna tell you what happened.' And, he would tell us things about what he remembers growing up, things his mother told him, and uncles, and other relatives. And that's basically how histories were shared. Shared more verbally than anything else.

Kerry Reed [00:54:25] So then, would these be, you know, would these be the regular conversations that your father would have with you all?

Anthony Adams [00:54:35] All the time.

Brenda Adams [00:54:35] He would tell us about how it was growing up for him, and some of the things he remembered being told by his mother. Because, he was very young when his father died. And other relatives, and the same with my mother. My mother told us tons of stories of life growing up in Louisiana.

Anthony Adams [00:54:57] I would like to add, there was a lot of knowledge and a lot of wisdom there, because they grew up in during the Depression. They was coming through the Depression, and a lotta people was doing this or going to the soup kitchen, all this. They didn't have to, because they had their own gardens and they was hunting. We had deer in the area. And one of the older guys go, maybe even go down to Fort Belvoir, that's before they really got expanded. Plenty of deer. The men would bring back two or three deer, and then cut it up for the family. And one our cousins used to go and get the big mud turtles. And they'd come back, and cook it right in the backyard in one of the houses, and they'd have turtle soup. And one of our cousins used to give us either ten or twelve cents to bring squirrels. And you know who I'm talking about. They used to cook squirrels and I tasted some and it tasted almost like chicken. It was good.

Kerry Reed [00:56:11] Yeah. Yeah.

Anthony Adams [00:56:11] You heard?

Kerry Reed [00:56:11] I've had squirrel, yeah.

Anthony Adams [00:56:14] And so, you know, we had a lot of wisdom and knowledge in how to survive. And, some of the family members knew certain things because, like I said, a lot of the men went into service back then.

Kerry Reed [00:56:30] Yeah.

Anthony Adams [00:56:30] And, they learned a lot of training even if they didn't go overseas, they was in the country and it was scattered all around. And the ones that went over to Europe and in the South Pacific theater, they learn how to survive in the jungles and in the mountains and through the cold. And my father always tell me when you're shoveling snow, don't keep looking down the snow. There you go and plus it, the breathing. And I learned that, and also when you are doing certain yard work, certain times of the season and the kids don't learn that today.

Kerry Reed [00:57:06] Yeah.

Anthony Adams [00:57:07] And it's just amazing how, I had an older cousin that went to school with my father, that we used to always call, I always used to call Uncle Tommy, because he was a year older than my father. And he used to tell me things all the time. I listened to all the older people. So, I was told I had an older spirit, because I learned a lot of old things that I still know today. And I did some hunting in my young years, but then after I realized the animals don't have a chance. So I stopped hunting.

Brenda Adams [00:57:41] That's important, though. One of the things he said, because some of the people in the neighborhood would also share history with you.

Anthony Adams [00:57:47] Yeah, history.

THE MUDTOWN COMMUNITY

Kerry Reed [00:57:50] So, I was curious about that because, you mentioned that your father's friends from the water company would come around and play cards and things like that. So, were there a lot of community gatherings, I guess, like that in the neighborhood?

Brenda Adams [00:58:07] Folks would go to each other's houses and visit, yes. I would say yes, they would go to each others' houses and go visit.

Anthony Adams [00:58:14] But most of the time, the crowd would meet at the church, you know, they have church evening service. They have big meals, or have what they call, I forgot what they called the tent thing, once a year, you go to the jubilee thing, like that's okay, because you know you gotta realize when you go Catholic and Baptist, and you meet a lot of people. And sometimes, they had family gathers at the park, which might be Fort Ward at the time. And most times people had big enough yards, they had little cookouts in their backyard. And if somebody smelled smoke, you didn't have to be invited. You just come over and get a hot dog.

Brenda Adams [00:58:57] In our neighborhood back then, you were always welcome to go to someone else's house and if you were passing by and you smelled their good cooking, you could go in.

Anthony Adams [00:59:07] Everybody knew everybody.

Brenda Adams [00:59:10] Now, once they built the new neighborhood up there in the early sixties, we used to have what we call block parties every Memorial Day.

Kerry Reed [00:59:19] Okay.

Brenda Adams [00:59:20] And all the families, you cooked in your yards, all your families came over, and then at the cul-de-sac of the street at Woods Place, it was just a cul-de-sac, they would open it up and they would have a band play there. And one of the neighbors had a band. Mr. Brooks. His band used to play there, and all the families would get together with all their relatives. And sometimes, once a year, that was a great opportunity to see cousins and other friends that you went to school with, that you didn't normally see on a daily basis. You could always count on seeing them Memorial Day.

Anthony Adams [00:59:51] Exactly.

Brenda Adams [00:59:53] So, that was a big affair.

Anthony Adams [00:59:58] And I would like to add to that. It was usually over three hundred people. And everybody's yard had a set up where they had picnic tables and food. And then, you also had the big food up at the circle, the cul-de-sac, up in the circle where Mr. Brooks would have his band. And I know, because I used to work for him at a young age, I'd cut his grass. And on Friday night, I used put his band equipment in a station wagon, which he would drive down to his club and play jazz right here in Alexandria, I think the Departmental Club, on the weekend. And then

Sunday morning, after I come from church, I go up to his house and unload the band equipment back in his basement. And then Tuesday and Wednesday, I cut his grass.

Brenda Adams [01:00:44] And his wife still lives there.

Kerry Reed [01:00:46] Oh really?

Brenda Adams [01:00:46] She's one hundred years old.

Kerry Reed [01:00:47] Oh my gosh.

Anthony Adams [01:00:48] A hundred and one.

Brenda Adams [01:00:48] Well, I was close. But she's, yeah, she's at least one hundred.

Kerry Reed [01:00:52] Hat's off to her. Oh my word.

Brenda Adams [01:00:53] And his granddaughter, you know, she spends her time between the house there on Woods Place, and her granddaughter's house on Quaker Lane. But she still lives in there.

Anthony Adams [01:01:02] She still lives there.

Kerry Reed [01:01:03] I need to talk to her. Oh my word. That's an interview I definitely need to do.

Anthony Adams [01:01:07] And as far as back in the neighborhood, it was no problem, even the local police would come by, park his car at the beginning of the street at Woods Avenue, because he couldn't drive up because it was blocked off. And he'll walk up and get a sandwich or a soda, a drink, and it didn't matter whose name it was, because everybody knew the police. I'm telling you, we had a couple of police that had our area and we knew them by heart.

Kerry Reed [01:01:38] Absolutely.

Anthony Adams [01:01:39] And back in the days, people would just see you and, you know, they'd speak to you. Ask you how your parents are doing, you know, if they haven't seen them in a while. That was one thing you don't do today.

Kerry Reed [01:01:55] Actually very congenial community, seems like.

Brenda Adams [01:01:58] It was a very close knit community and, to be honest with you, you don't see communities like that anymore. Nowadays, you move into a neighborhood, you can live there for ten years, and not know two neighbors down the street, not know two houses down, you didn't even know who lives there. So, neighborhoods are different today than they were back then and that was a very close knit Black community.

LEARNING ABOUT THE ADAMS FAMILY HISTORY

Kerry Reed [01:02:23] So, it seems like you all started to learn your family history through stories that your father and mother would tell you at various intervals. The campfire or out in the woods, life lessons, so on and so forth. So I guess, because kids, you know, sometimes they can go in one ear and out the other. So I was curious, when did you all start to really pay attention to these stories? Like my parents are imparting generational wisdom and knowledge on me.

Brenda Adams [01:02:54] Well, they told the stories and you always listened attentively, because my father told good stories.

Anthony Adams [01:03:01] Yeah, good stories.

Brenda Adams [01:03:02] But, I think by the time I was ten years old, I started kind of looking at the stories, not differently, but looking at them more in depth, because of what I was experiencing outside of the home. You know, once you start going to school, it's a whole different ballgame. You start learning new things, a new environment, and that kind of thing. And so the stories took on different meanings.

Kerry Reed [01:03:29] Okay. Absolutely.

Anthony Adams [01:03:31] I would say the same. I guess I would always listen to, I like adventure, and he's talking about adventures, stories about family or relatives, and everything about the military. Our minds was always like open. Bat ears. And even some of the neighbors that were military soldiers, former military, I used to always talk to them, and they used to sit and talk to me all the time. One was, one of my neighbors down the street, in the Seminary neighborhood when Sergeant Young moved his family down in that area from Fort Worth, he used to tell me about his career in the military and he gave me some of his military equipment. I had his helmet, and that vest and stuff like that. And I still have my father's military stuff to this day. So, I was always interested in the stories. And as I got to be thirteen, I started listening to some of the real wisdom that came from my mother from Louisiana and my father, the places he traveled in that time period, of how people were in certain places. And then, that's when you start picking up about the different prejudices in the area or in the world, because you're growing up. They never, they didn't pay no mind. If a person was old enough to be your parent, it was always, 'Yes, sir,' and 'No, ma'am.' You know, always 'Yes sir,' or 'Yes, ma'am.'

Kerry Reed [01:05:07] Hmm, naturally.

Anthony Adams [01:05:07] No matter what color they were.

Kerry Reed [01:05:15] I've been itching at the bit, to learn more about your family history in Alexandria. I know how difficult it can be to ask someone to explain their history in a sort of concise manner. So I'm sorry to have to ask you that, but do you think that you could give me a summary of your family's history from as far back as you know it, until roughly about the time that you were born?

Brenda Adams [01:05:41] Oh, it's going all the way back.

Kerry Reed [01:05:43] As much as you can. Yeah.

Brenda Adams [01:05:47] My great-great-great-grandfather, George Adams was born probably in the 1800s. And he was settled in the area of Seminary. And if you know a little bit about what that area was, that was really Fairfax County. They settled at that fort and they were up in that area. Goes back a long way. And his kids, he had a daughter, Ada Adams, who married a Casey, John Wesley Casey. So, that brought the Caseys and the Adams family together, way back then. We, Clara Adams, Clara Shorts Adams, who lived at the fort with my uncle, great-uncle, Robert Adams. They had land, her family had land and I think she donated land for one of the first Black schools, and they also started a church up there, you know, so they lived at Fort Ward, a lot of them. And a lot, and there were some that lived down on this end also. My grandfather built that house, had that house built on the corner there on Quaker Lane. He was a postal worker. He worked for the seminary, the theological seminary. Delivered mail. He also delivered mail when he could to the Black families that lived in the community, the surrounding community there. And he was the one I also told you, that died in that storm back then.

Anthony Adams [01:07:26] And a preacher.

Brenda Adams [01:07:27] Yes, and he was a minister. He died when my father was a little boy. My father was like three years old. And my grandmother was pregnant with the youngest, Courtney. And so, they all came together and worked. I mean it was a hard life for them with no, you know, man of house. So, my grandmother did a fantastic job taking care of all those kids and my uncle, Uncle James Adams. Buster. We called him Uncle Buster. My father went off to the war and so did his youngest brother, Uncle Courtney. My father was in the army, Uncle Courtney was in the navy, and they went off the war. And I think, if I recall, the church had a ceremony for them going off to war.

Anthony Adams [01:08:14] Yeah, they did.

Brenda Adams [01:08:16] And there is a listing at Oakland Baptist Church, with all the names of the guys who went off to war back in 19, I think it's 1942 or 1944.

Anthony Adams [01:08:26] 1942.

Brenda Adams [01:08:26] And you'll see the names where they honor them at the church, and my father's name is on there, my Uncle Courtney, and tons of other neighbors are on there. Casey, that went off the war as well. My father met my mother in New Orleans, Louisiana, when she was probably barely out of high school. And he waited until she turned the right age. And they got married, and they came here. Once they came here, they had it blessed at the church a couple of years later, at Blessed Sacrament I believe, or St. Joseph's. And then, they started having all these kids. Us. I remember my grandmother very slightly, because I was pretty young. I was probably no more than about five or so.

Kerry Reed [01:09:13] Okay.

Brenda Adams [01:09:14] I think she died in, I don't know, 1959, when I was younger, earlier than that, earlier than that, because I was really little. But, I remember when I would go up to my cousin's house and we'd be playing, and we would say, 'Be quiet, because grandma's sleeping. Grandma's resting or something.' So, I remember all that. Pretty much, and on my mother's side, when the older ones were young, she used to take them to New Orleans. The oldest, the three older ones, and they were older than me, and her father died when she was young, and I remember at some point too, when the kids, the ones who went to school earlier, because my oldest brother was like seven years older than me. They had the chickenpox. They caught the chickenpox and came home. My poor mother had never had the chickenpox, so she caught the chickenpox. I was the baby, and of course I got the chickenpox. I don't even remember because I was just a baby. Little stories like that, and she, and then finally myself and my other deceased brother, Paul, when we were young, we didn't go to New Orleans on those trips that they went, because it kind of stopped when she started having all these kids, because money was pretty tight. But by the time Anthony and Patricia and Denise came along, she was taking summer trips there, and she would take them to New Orleans.

Anthony Adams [01:10:40] Every summer.

Brenda Adams [01:10:40] And it was really just to, you know, make sure that we were familiar with our roots on her side of the family as well. So, but we, and we had uncles, an uncle who would come up here, come from New Orleans to here and visit. So, we kind of kept our history going on both sides of the family. And I know, I remember one of the neighbors said, when my father first came with this new wife, they thought she was from a foreign country, because she had that accent, because they spoke Creole. And I always thought that was really funny. And I remember when we got our first phone, or had access to a phone, when they would call, my aunts, I could hardly understand them on the phone. I mean their accents were very thick.

Kerry Reed [01:11:25] Yeah.

Brenda Adams [01:11:28] Combination of Creole and just that Southern accent too. And so, that was pretty much fun to listen to. Yeah, we learned a lot of history from them.

Kerry Reed [01:11:42] Sounds like it. Absolutely.

Brenda Adams [01:11:44] My mother's mother died when she was three years old. And she was raised by, and her father, the story is that my grandfather, Dominique, took the kids, she and her youngest brother, or younger brother, over to Baton Rouge to see her deceased mother's sisters and they went to visit and they liked it there so much, and you know, here he was a grown man. He couldn't take care of this little girl, and the boy, and he had other kids. And the other older ones, they were pretty much a little more self-sufficient. And so, they stayed there with my three aunts, and my mother was raised by her three aunts in Baton Rouge. And my mother also went, in this story I love to tell, I graduated from St. Mary's Academy here in Alexandria. My mother graduated from St. Mary's Academy in New Orleans. It's just a coincidence, I guess.

Kerry Reed [01:12:40] Absolutely.

Brenda Adams [01:12:43] And my father, you know, he went to school in D.C., Armstrong, and back then, and they couldn't go to school in Elgin because it was segregated. And I remember, if I

can remember some of the stories he would tell about the journey to those schools, it was part walking, part bussing, part whatever, whatever you could do to get there. And... it was hard getting back and forth from way over there. And I think we had an aunt that lived in Georgetown at the time, I think it was Aunt Katie. And she was married, and sometimes he would stay over, just stay over, because sometimes it was just too rough to get back and forth.

Kerry Reed [01:13:27] Absolutely.

Brenda Adams [01:13:28] It was a pretty tough life, but you never know it if you had met my father or met my mother. You would never know the trials and tribulations that they may have experienced, because they were still just a happy, happy people. And they did what they had to do to survive. And never complained really.

Kerry Reed [01:13:54] Please.

Anthony Adams [01:13:55] Will you repeat the question again?

Kerry Reed [01:13:59] Yeah, absolutely. I was curious about y'all's family history, and if you could tell it to me, as far back as you are aware of. And again, I hate to be asked somebody to give me a concise account of their family history. But, you know, so do you think you could do the same as you know it?

Anthony Adams [01:14:19] Yes, I agree with my sister here and what she said basically about the history, going back to the 18th, and even some almost to the 17th. We got information on that, and they went through some hard times, and you know, but they made it, you know, it was the thing of the times. You do what you have to do. And as far as my mother, going on my mother's side, I enjoyed them trips going to Baton Rouge to New Roads in the summer. We used to stay there for two to three weeks, and I learned a lot from my three aunts. And, I was learning French in elementary school, and one of the French teachers used to always talk to me all the time about French. And I used to try to pick up on some. You cannot understand Creole, if you know French, if they speak fast, but they can understand French, okay? And when they wanna talk back then, in the late sixties, early seventies, I had the little bush, you know, back in the day. And they used to tell my mother in Creole, 'Why don't that boy get his hair cut? That's too much hair on his head,' and my mother tell me what they will say. But, they keep looking at you, because of that hair. Okay? And so, I used to comb it down, so I could be patted down. And I enjoyed just working with them in their garden. Go out and catch crayfish in the morning. That's what they make there in the gumbo. You gotta catch cray fish early in the morning, when they come out the hole. But, you also gotta watch for the snakes, and the insects, and helping the daily routines, and doing the work, because there wasn't any air conditioning. But, it was cool. They had the window fans, and you did your chores. I would do stuff around the house, and working in her, cleaning her garden. When we wasn't there, she had kin folks that lived not too far away, and cousins, that were young guys that would clean her garden and do things. And I learned a lot down there, what to do, and what not to do. When you walk downtown, Baton Rouge or New Roads, you never stare at a white woman. And you always, no matter how old a person was, when you're walking down a sidewalk and they're coming at you, instead of walking behind each other, you would move over. And that didn't dawn on me, until I got to be a teenager. And also, certain places you didn't even go in, even if you had

the money, you can buy something, but you might get a stern look, or either some kind of comment. So, and that was down south.

Kerry Reed [01:17:13] Yup.

Anthony Adams [01:17:13] And also, certain places, my grandmother even told us, 'Don't walk too far to Black neighborhood down in New Roads.' So, you know, that was part of it. Then you come back here, on my father's side, he used to tell me about things that he went through, and my mother never experienced too much of that, because she was sheltered by her great-aunts. And then, my father married her at an early age and brought her up this way. But up here, he was telling me a story which is documented, and some of it was documented in a similar way that I told the story, that he came on leave once from the service and went down to Old Town, Alexandria, and came down to one of these little gardens, or big gardens, or, you know, clubs. And on the way back, he missed the bus. He was walking back. The Night Riders was out. And people go, 'Who's the Night Riders?' These are the people who had carriages, with wheels that had rubber around it, and the horse had the hoofs covered with rubber, so you couldn't hear them creep up on you. And they would catch people at night, mostly Blacks, and it's documented, you probably have looked that up, that sometimes they would be taken in for experiments. And he said, by his military experience, he ran off or got off of King Street and got in the high shrubberies, like he was in the military, and he crawled out and the guys walked right past him. And I thought that was sort of, 'Wow,' but then after I did some more research and looked it up, it was really true. And so, he used to tell us things like this, and used to always tell us young, just to keep us off the streets at night, or going out at late at night. If he knew it was outside, he wouldn't go out there. And it wasn't more about natural things, he was just saying, to keep stuff coming in from, you know, going out. And also, I know that the things he used to tell us about treating people right, and being polite. And always had a kind word to say to somebody, because once you say something out your mouth, it's out there, you can't bring it back. And people remember what you say. And, that was a lot of wisdom that I was brought up with. And also, telling us more about what my sister was saying about our ancestors. Clara Shorts Adams also donated a part of her land for the cemetery up at Fort Ward from Oakland Baptist, so the people could have somewhere to be buried. And her name and a plaque is up there today, if you ever go to Fort Ward, you'll see that. They also, she donated a lot towards, to help the Oakland Baptist Church she started. She was one of the top three, I understand it was top five, but she was one of the three that invested money, her and her husband, to get things going. So, she had a lot of clout, as far as business, getting back to the business question earlier, they was good with financing. And she, you know, they accumulated wealth through land. And I tell you also, that not only that, some of our relatives had got land, brought land from them.

Brenda Adams [01:20:56] I was just thinking of something, when you were talking about the land and finances. Back in those days, and this is pre-sixties, Blacks were land rich, that owned their land. Didn't have a lot of money, but they had land. And when times were really hard, they would sell a piece of land to get money. It could be enough to get them through the winter, but they would, or a couple of winters, but they would sell a piece of land, a lot or something, to get extra money. So I don't know if you want to call it like a business, but they definitely had business sense.

Kerry Reed [01:21:32] Mm. Yes. Absolutely.

Anthony Adams [01:21:35] One of the other things my father used to say, and I also had an older cousin back then, much older than my father, every dime, I mean every dollar you make, save a dime. And, that was the thing that stayed in my head over the years. I didn't do too well doing it, but you know, I was going to say something, but it was just amazing how little things like that, they would train the kids and relatives to do, and that's how they were able to have what today, we call it side hustles. You know, they had one job they might work in as a cook, domestic worker, or do yard work, and the other job that might be babysitting in the evening for a white family or something, and they put money away for what they call hard times.

Kerry Reed [01:22:28] Mm-hmm. Really quick, so the oldest and, excuse me, the oldest ancestor that you know of that has been living in Seminary or Alexandria, was that in the early 19th century? Early 1800s?

Brenda Adams [01:22:47] That was 1800s, but if we can go back to 1700s. So when we were talking, I was talking about George Adams.

Kerry Reed [01:22:54] Yeah.

Brenda Adams [01:22:54] I have some, where could you, I can give you the exact date. It was in the 1800s, but I found information to his mother. You know, we'd go all the way back to the 1700s with his mother, her name was, I just know her first name, Lett. But he was born, George was born like 1825, and his mother was in the 1700s. And as far back as we can remember, there was no slavery on my father's side of the family. Maybe Lett's mother was a freed slave. But beyond that, there was no slavery on the Adam's side of things.

Kerry Reed [01:23:45] So, Lett then would be the oldest ancestor that you know of that was in this area?

Brenda Adams [01:23:52] I can go back further, but, you know, I want to...

Kerry Reed [01:23:55] Right. What can be documented. Absolutely. I understand. So, how does it make you feel, knowing that your family's history goes back three hundred years, almost three hundred years at this point?

Brenda Adams [01:24:09] It's great, it makes us fifth generation Alexandria. But more than that, just to find your history, we lived a certain way, we were kind of sheltered from a lot of things growing up in our family. I mean us kids. You know, we went to Blessed Sacrament and, you know, just like some of the Black kids had their trials and tribulations going to the public schools. We had a little bit at the Catholic school. I remember going there, you know, we were different. And kids will be kids. Why is your skin that color? You know why does your hair look like that? Or they may repeat something they may have heard somewhere else.

Anthony Adams [01:24:46] Yeah.

Brenda Adams [01:24:49] But kids will be kids, you know, they only repeat what they've heard. But as they get to know you, kids become friendly and they don't care, they just look at having fun and learning and, you know, kids are just so innocent in my eyes anyway. But, when I think about the

difference between how I grew up and how my parents grew up, it's just amazing. And then, they think about how their parents grew up and then their parents grew up. The struggles and everything. But what really strikes me is, or what warms my heart, is to know how close everyone was, how close the people were during those times. And not just my immediate relatives, but even the neighbors. You know, relatives came by each other's houses all the time, they always came to visit. But, I was just amazed as to how far it went back, and the contributions they made, and where they lived, to live through wars, to, you know, live through a civil war, live through Jim Crow, live through all that stuff, and survive, it's just, you know it's amazing. And where we are today is really amazing. Where Alexandria is today is really amazing. I remember when it was just a place, but now it's just this beautiful city that I just adore. I love it here.

Kerry Reed [01:26:18] Absolutely. How does it make you feel, Mr. Adams?

Anthony Adams [01:26:22] Makes me feel great to know the full history of our family, because our parents told us certain things, but certain things we found out through looking things up, and also with the Seminary Theological Center, and also by Char Bah [Char McCargo Bah], that looked up a lot of stuff, and she's a professional at this so she knew where to look. And I was just amazed, and as I checked around, people, I mean you're talking about a couple years ago, from a couple of cousins that passed, I was up in the eighties, and they had documentation and told us about things too. And it was just amazing to know, that you had a rich family history, and a good family history. No bad things that really really happened in the family, like you hear about the family and dynasties and stuff happen over the years. We didn't have all that, but we had a lot of knowledge, and a lot of experience that was shared through the kids through, you know, down to the kids.

Kerry Reed [01:27:29] Absolutely.

Anthony Adams [01:27:32] One say, I remember one saying I remember, 'Don't do anything wrong and shame the family name,' and 'Whatever you do, don't don't disrespect your neighborhood or the neighbors.'

Kerry Reed [01:27:48] Absolutely.

Anthony Adams [01:27:49] Mm-hmm. That was that. And everybody in the neighborhood, seemed like they went their way. The kids walk down the street, 'Hi, Ms. So-and-So,' 'Hi, Mr. So-and-so.' And that's the way.

Brenda Adams [01:28:00] Yeah.

Anthony Adams [01:28:01] You never called person out by their name, and sometimes you might not call them by their first name. You'll call them, I mean, the last name, you'll call by their first name, Miss B, or Miss this, or Miss that. You know, Miss Goldie, if it wasn't kin, we always called her Cousin Goldie. Even though she was like 80-something years old, we was like kids, but always Cousin Goldie. If Cousin Goldie wants something from the store, and she see me riding a bicycle, 'Anthony, you mind riding through the store, get a loaf of bread and such, such, such,' and she'll give me a dollar and keep the change. You know sometimes be a quarter left, I can do a lot with a quarter back then, and drive back, and also my next door neighbor, in the new seminary, Ms. Diggs, she always used to send me to the store to get something for her. Could be just pepper or to get two

tomatoes. You know, people did that. Now they're just scared to ask somebody, can you borrow a shovel or something. You know what I'm just saying.

Kerry Reed [01:29:04] So, Mr. Adams, how often do you get the chance to talk about your family history?

Anthony Adams [01:29:08] Often. I bring it down to my kids. I have three kids, and they're all adults. And I tell them all the time, and some information I have here, I've even forwarded it to them and gave it to one of my grandkids. I talk to my grandkids all the times. I take her up to Fort Ward and walk around the areas where her ancestors, you know, are buried and also showed her the place where Aunt Clara Adams lived, which house should it be, and also how much land we had, and I showed her in the backyard. And in our backyard now that I'm in the family home where my father built years ago, on the family house, it's a little concrete plaque back there that my brother put his name in. Still, they're there, that's the one that's deceased. He was about four years older than me, and we was like this. So, you know, it's a lot of history, and I used to tell them, you know, what we did there, where the big tree was, where the big truck tire hung, where we used to swing, and also other things, and the little seesaw my father had for us, put a log on it. We used to get a little seesaws, had a little wrench. We used go up and down, and where the dogs used to be, we had German shepherds at one time, that was two Black German shepherds. Big German shepherds. The house was about as big as this table, and I used to go in and crawl in there, when one of the brothers or siblings after me or one of the neighbors or my cousins after me, I'd run in the backyard run in the house, because I know they wouldn't come next to them German shepherds. It was as high as this table, and you know just major things like that, and also we had a cat that looked like a little lion, I think. I'd never forget Sam, that was her cat, to this day I got a battle scar. I got two stripes here, where he scratched. So yeah, I remember all the good things. And also, I just tell them how much history, and I take my granddaughter walking down Quaker Lane, and also sometimes over to the seminary or pistol area, and all through Fort Ward and Chinquapin. And they were just amazed to know how, you know, we grew up. I said we stayed outside most of the time and played, so that was a good thing to pass down to the kids. They don't do that. I fly kites with her all the time on, they call it the Alexandria School [Alexandria City High School] now, back then it was T.C. Williams, when we go, when the winds blow, we fly the big kite out on the football field over there. And she enjoy that.

Kerry Reed [01:32:00] Absolutely.

Brenda Adams [01:32:01] And I have two nieces too. My youngest sister's daughter, she's like my daughter, and my deceased brother had a daughter. And both of these young ladies, one is thirty-six and the other is thirty-eight. I have shared a lot of family history with them. That thirty-eight-year-old, my deceased brother's daughter, she's really into genealogy. So, she's all over ancestry.com, finding new information and that kind of thing. And we had a family gathering a couple of months back, almost a year ago now, where we shared a lotta information with other family members. So we're passing the torch, making sure they're aware of how you got to be where you are today. Because I am a firm believer that if you don't understand your past, you can't understand your future too well either. Your present or your future.

Kerry Reed [01:32:56] So really briefly, Ms. Adams, I saw that you brought out a folder with a bunch of documents. Are those all about your kin and your ancestors?

Brenda Adams [01:33:04] Mm-hmm.

Kerry Reed [01:33:05] Do you have any plans to write any of this down into a book, or anything like that?

Brenda Adams [01:33:14] I mean it's a thought, but I do have some relatives, you'd be surprised, we have relatives now, who I'm hearing that they are thinking about writing books. And some of this stuff may be covered, but I would like to get it all written up, and make sure that it's passed on to the kids in our family, so they have all this information. We gather a lot of information just by research being done in the city, by the city, or by the Virginia Theological Seminary or Fort Ward, we've just gathered even more information because of those projects that were going on. And so, I've pieced together a lot of things. I've gotten a lot information. Char McCargo Bah has been a dream in terms of researching, and staying on top of family history. I mean, I've learned a lot from her. And I've learned a lot from others, you know, I have a family member, a cousin, who has done some work in talking, interviewing our relatives back in the day, not that far back, probably the nineties. But, I've pieced together a lot of information.

Kerry Reed [01:34:32] Mm-hmm.

Brenda Adams [01:34:34] And stories, and historical stuff, that kind of thing. And really, just doing it more to pass it on to the family.

Kerry Reed [01:34:41] Yeah. Absolutely. So, you mentioned the family reunion that y'all had almost a year ago. How many people were there, roughly?

Brenda Adams [01:34:51] Probably about fifty.

Kerry Reed [01:34:54] Fifty. Was that.....

Brenda Adams [01:34:54] It was just my father's children, his sister's children, and his other sister's children. So, it wasn't a wide open reunion. We were really just trying to learn more about our history. Before we can do a bigger thing, we needed to learn about our own individual history, and to make sure that our kids were involved, and that they knew all of our history. And it was just a day of fun. Fun and learning.

Kerry Reed [01:35:20] Got it. So just the Adams family then?

Brenda Adams [01:35:22] Mm-hmm.

Kerry Reed [01:35:23] Okay.

Anthony Adams [01:35:24] It was just the Adams family. And that was a good number. My sister said fifty, but it could have been just maybe fifteen more, sixty-five or so. It was pretty, counting all the grandkids and nieces and nephews. And then, we had a bigger thing at the Seminary Theological Center [Virginia Theological Seminary], a year or so ago. And that was like, in the evening you come in, that was probably way over three hundred and something. All the relatives.

Brenda Adams [01:35:50] That's the Virginia Theological's annual gala, in honor of our ancestors that worked, and lived up at the fort. Lived and worked up at the seminary.

Anthony Adams [01:36:01] And most of that, was from the people who lived in the Mudtown-Seminary Area, you know?

Kerry Reed [01:36:08] What was it like to, did y'all attend that gala?

Brenda Adams [01:36:11] Yes.

Anthony Adams [01:36:11] Yes.

Kerry Reed [01:36:12] What was it like to go there?

Brenda Adams [01:36:12] It was wonderful, I mean.....

Anthony Adams [01:36:14] They went all out.

Brenda Adams [01:36:17] I commend the Theological Center for doing what they did, you know, a reparation program. It's something they didn't have to do. I know a lot of organizations and institutions around the country are doing that, and they didn't have to do that, and they did. They took on that responsibility, and I'm sure it ended up a lot bigger, than what they originally thought. A lot bigger. But, they have helped us uncover a lot of our ancestry too, through the work that Charbar did with them, and the lady named Maddie, I can't remember Maddie's last name, who did work at the Episcopal with the genealogy, to get that information together. Who were the people that worked up at the fort, up at that seminary, or lived there. And so, it's been interesting, and I just commend them for taking on a project like that.

Kerry Reed [01:37:11] Absolutely. So, Ms. Adams, when you were learning, I know it's been a lifelong process, but is there anything that you've learned about your ancestors that has surprised you at all?

Brenda Adams [01:37:26] Yeah. I was shocked when I found out just how far back they went in history, back to the 1700s. That was a shock, that we could even find that kind of information. As we both know, a lot of information on Black history is destroyed back from those times, or just wasn't kept. Some of the other surprises were, I knew my grandfather was a mailman, but I didn't know his father was a mailman also. So, that was interesting to learn. And then, learning what my father went through growing up. Losing his father at three. His duty in the Army. All of those things are a surprise.

Kerry Reed [01:38:17] Absolutely.

Anthony Adams [01:38:20] And I would like to add, you know, just learning as far as our knowing that my father, when he was younger, did taxes for the people in the Mudtown Seminary Area. I didn't know. I knew he was good with math. He knew how to think out money, by just looking at it to tell you how much you had, or something like that. But, I heard that from the older people in the neighborhood before they passed. 'Well, Anthony, you should know, your father was good in taxes.'

You know, you should be able to, you know, because I used to try to add up my pennies. And they used to do our taxes. I didn't know he was very, very knowledgeable with mathematics. And I understand he wanted to go to school as an engineer. And after he got out of the war, and he couldn't get the funds from the military, and this is a story I heard many times, one other gentleman I know in the area that wanted to be a lawyer, wanted to go to Howard and he was denied, because he couldn't get the money and his white predecessors, they all was able to go to school. Some of the old senators, that were Congressman years ago, were just as less fortunate as far as finance, than some of the Blacks, when they came out to service, got the GI Bill and was able to continue their education. And they went to law school, all of it was paid, and they ended up on Capital Hill today, some of the older ones. If you looked at the past, if you read some of Mitch McConnell's history, they was really dirt poor. And he used it to go to school and up to Calvary, what, forty years or something. But, I'm just saying how the system was different back then and even now, it's just rough because they're changing things now. But the thing is, that to know that the disappointment the family had back then, trying to advance itself. And they had to go for, settle for lesser careers and jobs.

Brenda Adams [01:40:50] Yeah, they worked hard. That part pains me a bit, when I think about how hard they had to work just to put food on the table. And they couldn't think about a lot of other things. I mean, between raising kids, putting food on table, and trying to get money to buy this, buy that, there was little time to think about other things.

Anthony Adams [01:41:09] And I also heard the story, where some of the people would get letters. They would bring it down to my father to read some of their letters. My mother and father were very educated. Even though they went to high school, but it seemed like back then, the high schools back in them days was like going to college, because the teachers put a lot in from the Black schools because they know these kids had to really make it. So, they were really push it up. And he was very disciplined, I understand, in the schools back then.

Brenda Adams [01:41:40] And they tried to teach him trades.

Anthony Adams [01:41:42] Yes.

Kerry Reed [01:41:44] Okay.

Brenda Adams [01:41:46] To piggyback on what Anthony said, I remember several neighbors, even current neighbors, and I don't like to call names or anything, but they would say, 'You know, your father was really smart.' So yeah, he used to help do the taxes of people in the neighborhood.

Kerry Reed [01:42:01] Was that when he was a teenager? When he was a child?

Brenda Adams [01:42:04] No, he was probably a young man.

Kerry Reed [01:42:06] Okay, young man. Got it. Got it, got it. So, how does it feel to talk about your ancestors, your family history here today?

Anthony Adams [01:42:17] It feels good, it feels good and it brings back memories. And it brings back some of their pain, you know, what they went through. And it sorta pushed you to do a little

more. And also, to share this knowledge with your kids and grandkids, with my grandkids. And like I said, all three of my kids are doing well. And I just think, the answers for their hard work and what they've been through to instill in me, to pass on to them.

Kerry Reed [01:42:55] Absolutely.

Brenda Adams [01:42:56] And I'm just happy to know, that people are interested in our story and, I'm really happy to see that the city is interested in getting it out there, and people will learn about our history. Because our history is Alexandria's history.

Kerry Reed [01:43:15] Absolutely.

Brenda Adams [01:43:16] So it's not a separate thing, it's a together thing. Just a history of the city. That part is amazing to me. I'm just so good, it couldn't come at a better time. Maybe, could have come sooner.

Kerry Reed [01:43:32] Yeah.

Brenda Adams [01:43:32] But, anytime is a good time.

Kerry Reed [01:43:35] For sure.

Anthony Adams [01:43:36] I'd like to add, I didn't say much else about siblings, but even my older brothers and sisters, they was hard workers. They all had jobs. And in some cases, had two jobs. You know, like a full-time or part-time job. And they owned homes, and they was self-sufficient to support themselves, even in my career. I've worked hard and had two jobs for a number of years, a part-time and a full-time job to make sure all three of my kids went to college. Two of them have masters, one of them has two masters and also a military officer. He's ready to become a commander.

Kerry Reed [01:44:19] Oh, wow.

Anthony Adams [01:44:20] That's like a lieutenant colonel, if you're in the army or marines. If you in the navy or coast guard, they call the lieutenant-colonel, they call that a commander. So, you know he's doing great things.

Kerry Reed [01:44:34] Absolutely.

Brenda Adams [01:44:35] Anthony said something very interesting too, about our brothers and sisters, hard workers. And if we go back in time again, I remember when we were growing up with our old house, and I told you it was coal burning stoves and wood burning stove. My brothers used to go and cut wood. They would go out and literally, my father would send them out to go cut wood, so that we'd have wood for the fireplace. And, they would go in the area around our house. They would also go, I don't know if I should say this, saying it with a laugh. They would also go up to the Virginia Theological Seminary and the municipal high school, and cut wood from the trees that they had to bring home, so that we had enough wood to keep warm and to cook food and that kind of thing. So everybody did have jobs. My sister, my oldest sister who is deceased, she helped

my mother take care of the rest of us. I remember growing up and I was confused. I was like, 'Are you my mother?' But, so it was really a close knit kind of thing, where the older kids looked out for the younger ones, and it goes on and on and on. And, that's just the way we were raised to look out for each other. But, it was a tough time and everybody had a job.

Anthony Adams [01:45:45] I would say it was hard.

Brenda Adams [01:45:46] I didn't have one, but I was there. I'd help where I could.

Anthony Adams [01:45:50] I say it was hard, because she mentioned about all the brothers. They used to cut the wood before they go to school. So they did it early in the morning, bring the wood back to the house. So, we have wood through the day into the night. And as an older sister, she's a cook. And take care of me, because when my mother started doing other domestic work, she would make sure I'd come home from school and get going, because she worked at night, right?

Brenda Adams [01:46:18] She worked in daytime, but she also had another...

Anthony Adams [01:46:19] Not mother, my sister. Older sister.

Brenda Adams [01:46:20] Oh, she worked, yeah, she did nursing. She worked at a place in Ellicott City.

Kerry Reed [01:46:27] Okay.

Brenda Adams [01:46:27] But, I was gonna say something about my mom. My mother did have, after the youngest was in school, and my mother went to work for a bank. There was a white gentleman, Mr. Donald Burchill, who she used to do some domestic work for, and he got her hired, he was a bank vice president or something. He was up there. And she got a job at the bank, right up in Bradlee, as a bank teller. And the bank was called at the time United Virginia Bank, which turned into Crestar, which turned into SunTrust, which is now Truist. So there's a long history there, and she was there for about twelve years before she retired due to illness.

Kerry Reed [01:47:18] So, is y'all's family buried at Freedman's cemetery or.....

Brenda Adams [01:47:21] No, my father's buried at Quantico.

Kerry Reed [01:47:24] Quantico, oh.

Brenda Adams [01:47:25] Because he was in the military, and my mother's buried there with him. But, we do have relatives buried up in Fort Ward.

Kerry Reed [01:47:33] Fort Ward.

Brenda Adams [01:47:35] And we have, I think we have some, we have a dozen relatives too at Freedmen's.

Anthony Adams [01:47:38] Freedmen's, yeah.

Brenda Adams [01:47:44] I mean, we're related to so many different, you know, our family branches out so wide, in this area, that I'm sure we cover most of the cemeteries here.

Kerry Reed [01:47:57] When did you all come into contact with Char Bah?

Anthony Adams [01:48:01] Well, I knew her back in high school.

Kerry Reed [01:48:06] Okay.

Anthony Adams [01:48:07] She was, her and her sister, we all went to T.C. But, we lost contact. But, I met her again when we went through this history started back in the late nineties. They started doing things. It was like ninety-nine, ninety-eight.

Brenda Adams [01:48:28] I don't know. I came in contact with Char when I started working with her on Fort Ward.

Anthony Adams [01:48:35] Okay, it was in two-thousand-something. But, I knew of, started to talk about the reparation stuff like that in ninety-nine and two thousand. And then we started having meetings and stuff, like at Oakland Baptist Church. People was coming from D.C. trying to learn the story, but nobody never signed anything, because they want to get our rights. And I knew of her, as far as the type of work she'd done with Freedmen and different other places, right? And also, in the D.C. area.

Brenda Adams [01:49:12] Also, through my work with the NAACP, I sit on their executive committee, so I remember her from different little projects around the city.

Kerry Reed [01:49:25] Just a quick sidebar, how did you come to sit on the NAACP Executive Committee? That's really interesting.

Brenda Adams [01:49:30] I actually have been on that committee since 2001. 2000, 2001. It was my cousin who introduced me and wanted me to join, you know, I was out of college to say, 'Oh, you can do this.' And so I joined in like 2001, and I've been on their executive committee membership chair mostly.

Kerry Reed [01:49:54] That's funny.

Brenda Adams [01:49:55] And actually, I'm on several organizations in this city. I'm also vice chair of board of directors for Concerned Citizens Network of Alexandria, which you've probably heard of. So, I'm on their vice chair. Also, Continental Societies Incorporated, that's a social organization, and we do a lot of volunteer work in the city here. Helping, we mostly, our focus is on children. Underprivileged children. So, we do a lot of things. We work with the Carpenter House [Carpenter's Shelter]. In fact, we just did a project with Carpenter House buying and packaging toiletries for the residents there. We've done health fairs, done all kinds of things. What else am I doing? I can't keep track of everything. Remember the Northern Virginia chapter of the Junior League? Northern Virginia Chapter of the National Coalition of 100 Black Women.

Kerry Reed [01:50:55] You're busy.

Brenda Adams [01:50:56] I've been very busy. I'm still very busy and I know I've missed something, and I'm sorry.

Kerry Reed [01:51:02] Don't, it's no problem at all. It's very fascinating. So, when did Char start looking into your all's family history?

Brenda Adams [01:51:17] I think, from my focus, I know she's probably been doing it to some degree for different projects. But the ones that I'm most familiar with, is working with Fort Ward and, like Anthony said, when they were doing work on genealogy with.....

Anthony Adams [01:51:31] Seminary.

Brenda Adams [01:51:31] Seminary, just Seminary itself. And then of course, I came along with the project up at Fort Ward in 2014, and she was doing some help with us then, a little. And also with the theological Seminary, when I really got to know her even better.

Kerry Reed [01:51:57] Yeah.

Brenda Adams [01:51:59] But, I knew of her just from my association with other organizations, and being around in the city, I knew her.

Kerry Reed [01:52:05] Mm, got it.

Brenda Adams [01:52:06] She does great work.

Kerry Reed [01:52:07] Absolutely. So, have both of you lived in the city your entire lives?

Brenda Adams [01:52:20] Mostly, I'm kind of back and forth. I've lived, all my life, I lived out in Maryland for like two, three years right after college. And then I was like, I am going back to Alexandria. So, I was back in Alexandria. And right now, I'm really on the outskirts of Fairfax and Alexandria, up on the West End. And so, I've been in this area all my lives, so we're talking seventy-two years.

Kerry Reed [01:52:48] Absolutely.

Brenda Adams [01:52:50] I'm not going anywhere.

Kerry Reed [01:52:51] You, Mr. Adams?

Anthony Adams [01:52:52] I've been in this area most of my life, but I also was stationed down in Tidewater, Virginia.

Kerry Reed [01:53:00] Oh, are you in the service?

Anthony Adams [01:53:01] That was law enforcement.

Kerry Reed [01:53:03] Law enforcement. Okay.

Anthony Adams [01:53:04] I worked at several major institutions down there, and also was on what they call a response team. In that instance, if they have a riot anywhere in parts of the city or in the prisons. And, I've been in several major ones. At Old Penitentiary, you probably don't even know it, it was torn down back in 1990. They've been built ever since, like, the late, 1799 or either 1800s. It used to be in 500 Spring Street in Richmond.

Kerry Reed [01:53:41] Okay

Anthony Adams [01:53:42] And I worked there, worked South Hampton, Deerfield, Greensville Correctional, that's where the state prison is now, they have the electric chair. And, I also did ride across the different areas. And, I was living in an area called Franklin, Virginia. Right on the border of North Carolina, almost four miles from North Carolina lines. And I'm there for several years, and my kids was born here, but moved down because my wife was, at the time, was from that area, and grew up in the Tidewater area, and was also in law enforcement back when I moved up here, with the juveniles detention center [Alexandria Juvenile Detention Center] and also a bounty hunter.

Kerry Reed [01:54:33] Okay.

Anthony Adams [01:54:33] But now I'm retired from all that.

Kerry Reed [01:54:36] Okay. Okay.

Anthony Adams [01:54:36] And like I said, all that stuff I learned as a child, from my father in the military, and kinfolks in the military, and how they did in the field. That sort of helped me, and I also was a trainer. And also, when I moved back up this area, but before I moved down to this area, I lived in Atlanta for like a year, but I've always been magnetic back to Alexandria. Coming always back to Alexandria. And this time now, I'm in the family home and the land, because my mother passed, we sold with the family, and I bought the family home because I wanted to keep it in the family.

Kerry Reed [01:55:19] Mm, naturally.

Anthony Adams [01:55:22] God willing it'll be continued, because it's going with the kids, whether they're going to have it, or keep it in the family, or a family member, whoever wants it because everybody has a home now.

Kerry Reed [01:55:34] When did you move back into the family home?

Anthony Adams [01:55:38] Back in 2000. No, 2003.

Kerry Reed [01:55:41] Okay. 2003. So, briefly, what-

Anthony Adams [01:55:46] But the family never lost the home.

Kerry Reed [01:55:50] Right, your mother was in there.

Anthony Adams [01:55:51] My mother was there, and one of my siblings was there to take care of her. So we decided to, you know, everybody wanted to, I just wanted to buy the home back, since nobody was going to live there.

Kerry Reed [01:56:06] So, how long was your career in law enforcement?

Anthony Adams [01:56:09] Oh, up until I retired on disability, I've stayed almost twenty years.

Kerry Reed [01:56:12] Twenty years? Okay.

Anthony Adams [01:56:15] Eighteen to twenty years, yeah.

Kerry Reed [01:56:17] What made you want to go into law enforcement?

Anthony Adams [01:56:20] Well, at a younger age, I was thinking about being a police officer here in Alexandria. But, I knew too many people. I don't think that would have worked out. I knew what was going on, or I knew some of the things that were going on. So I said, 'No, not that.' But, my ambition was to go and do the U.S. Army. At a young age, I wanted to go in at seventeen and a half, but my mother didn't want me to, you know you had to have the parents to sign at that time. It wasn't like back in World War II, when Audie Murphy went in when he was fifteen. They didn't do any checking. But she said, talked to my father, said no. He said, 'Yeah, let him go out and be a man.' So just no, and then years later when I was old enough to join, I had other things in mind, you know. Branching out, good jobs, being with your friends in nightlife and people was going to Northern Virginia. As I got older, that's what made me decide to go into the military, I mean law enforcement.

Kerry Reed [01:57:29] Got it, got it.

Anthony Adams [01:57:31] You know, he had several jobs in between.

Kerry Reed [01:57:33] Of course. And then, Ms. Adams, before our interview started, you mentioned to me that you went to Howard.

Brenda Adams [01:57:41] Yes, I graduated from Howard University in 1976.

Kerry Reed [01:57:45] What did you study while you were at Howard?

Brenda Adams [01:57:47] I was a sociology and political science major.

Kerry Reed [01:57:51] Sociology and political science. What made you gravitate towards that field?

Brenda Adams [01:57:57] I just like studying about people, and their relationships to their environment and that kind of thing. Just understanding people more.

Kerry Reed [01:58:11] Absolutely. Then you worked for the federal government after college?

Brenda Adams [01:58:13] Actually, when I was in college, I worked at the Pentagon for the Air Force as an intern, summer jobs that I did for seven summers, even when I was in college. After college, I worked for a Alive Child Development. When I was at college, I also worked for Hopkins House. When I graduated from college, I worked at a Alive Child Development Center, and then I started a job at the Alexandria Health Department. And I was there for two years, and I met a gentleman that worked at personnel in Alexandria who said, 'You know, you should give me your resume. Let me float it around.' He floated it to Interior and, lo and behold, they called me and I got a job there. And I spent a thirty-five-plus year career in the federal government in supervisory and management jobs in budget and financial management.

Kerry Reed [01:59:06] Got it.

Brenda Adams [01:59:09] When I left, when I retired from the government, I started a consulting business and consulted back to them for a couple of years and I had a couple little private contracts as well. But, I've since shut all of that down.

Kerry Reed [01:59:26] You're too busy with the NAACP and the Concerned Citizens.

Brenda Adams [01:59:29] And all of the other things that I do.

Kerry Reed [01:59:30] Everything else absolutely

Brenda Adams [01:59:31] And I didn't want to work anymore, I said, 'I'm done with this.'

Kerry Reed [01:59:37] So, were you living in the West End at that time?

Brenda Adams [01:59:40] Yes, in fact I was living in Seminary at the family home.

Kerry Reed [01:59:48] So, at what stages of y'all's lives have you lived in the family home, because you lived there since 2003 correct?

Anthony Adams [01:59:54] Yes.

Kerry Reed [01:59:54] And then, when, how long were you.....

Anthony Adams [01:59:56] Well, I grew up there.

Kerry Reed [01:59:57] Well, yeah

Brenda Adams [01:59:58] But then you were married, and you moved away.

Anthony Adams [02:00:00] Yeah, I moved away

Kerry Reed [02:00:00] Well, that's what I meant. I should have phrased the question better. I'm sorry.

Anthony Adams [02:00:03] Let me start back.

Kerry Reed [02:00:04] Please.

Anthony Adams [02:00:04] Going back, even far back as I was talking about Korea and then I go to the family home. When I got out of school, I went to Northern Virginia and took computer science and then worked for a company called General Electric. And we do a microfilm, that's why I'm learning binary in computers. But then somehow, I got off of dealing with computers and stuff and was going into law enforcement. And I also went to George Washington for a year, just to take some courses. But, I didn't have a degree. But I learned a lot of, got a lot certificates and experience working with law enforcement.

Kerry Reed [02:00:47] Got it. Got it.

Anthony Adams [02:00:48] And as far as growing up, my whole childhood life to probably about eighteen or nineteen, you know, I was in the family home.

Brenda Adams [02:01:02] There were periods when we were there, you know, kids when they grow up they do things so, and piggybacking my own self. You know, once I graduated from college and then went to work, I moved out to Maryland for three and a half years, friend of mine had a townhouse or whatever, and I didn't really like it that much out there. And then my parents were home alone, and my father needed help with my mother, so I moved back home after three years. And before that, I mean, that was the only absence, so I was, I left at twenty-six, twenty-seven, came back at thirty, stayed until I was forty-two and bought a house, I bought a townhouse and that one was in Fairfax. Alexandria-Fairfax. And then I sold that one, moved back into Alexandria into another house, stayed there for six or seven years, sold that one and bought another house in Fairfax, stayed there a couple years, and sold that one, and I'm back here again. But I did, yes I did move back to the family home several times.

Kerry Reed [02:02:14] Okay.

Brenda Adams [02:02:14] But we basically just stayed in this area.

Kerry Reed [02:02:16] Yeah.

Brenda Adams [02:02:16] I even went to college here

Anthony Adams [02:02:20] I would like to add, family didn't really want to move too far away from my parents because, like my sister was saying, my parents were getting old and my mom needed some help, assistance. And several family members, you know, had lived further away or had families too. But, my sister and I used to always be available to step in and help out when somebody couldn't make it there, or couldn't be there. And I just wanted to stay close to the family, because I used to always like to walk the other big German shepherd my father had, and help out as much as I could. And I had a townhouse also, off of Route 1 area down there by Sands Court. That's where my kids were born and raised until we moved to the Tidewater area.

Brenda Adams [02:03:10] Yeah, you'll find that, you know, out of my eight brothers and sisters, none of us ever ventured far from Alexandria. Except him.

Kerry Reed [02:03:21] Richmond and Tidewater is like, an hour and a half to Richmond and then.....

Anthony Adams [02:03:25] We were an hour and a half to Richmond, but where I was living, it was about three hours, because I was close to North Carolina lines. And, you know, get back up this way.

Brenda Adams [02:03:39] It's a variety of reasons. This area is rich in employment opportunities, it's rich in culture. It is rich in everything really, so why would you want to live anywhere else?

Anthony Adams [02:03:51] Especially with the government right here, and the state. Virginia is one of the better states with what they call benefits.

Kerry Reed [02:03:59] Mm-hmm, absolutely. So, I'm interested then since y'all have stayed, this has sort of been the, I guess the nexus of y'all's lives for family and for careers. How have you seen Alexandria change, over the course of your lives? I know that's a loaded question.

Brenda Adams [02:04:21] Yeah, but you know what, for me it's an easy question. I think it's just fantastic how the city's grown. It has grown into probably one of the best cities, small cities in the country. I mean, there's so much history here, there's much opportunity here. I'm always down here at restaurants, I'm down here maybe three, four times a week. You know, I'll go to dinner down here. And Carolyn over at Metro Stage, you can go to plays there and different things. It's just a city that has everything. It's a very safe city. It's a very clean city. The people are very friendly. You know, all races seem to get along well. I mean, it's just got everything. It's just a rich city. Small town feel, and I love the waterfront, what they what they're doing down there at the waterfront is just wonderful. I remember back in the day, when no one really wanted to live near the waterfront down here. You could smell it.

Kerry Reed [02:05:28] Yeah.

Brenda Adams [02:05:28] In fact, I remember we lived on the West End and I can tell you on a good day, or I would say a bad day, you could smell it all the way up there.

Kerry Reed [02:05:37] Oof.

Brenda Adams [02:05:37] Yeah, and what they and now it's just one of the most beautiful spots to hang out.

Kerry Reed [02:05:43] Mmm, that should do it.

Brenda Adams [02:05:44] Just gorgeous. This is just a gorgeous place. I can't see myself living anywhere else.

Anthony Adams [02:05:51] I would say the same, but some of that smell was coming from the Del Ray area where the treatment center plant is too. The wind would blow a certain way from the north, you could smell it coming up that way. People was thinking that was mixed up with the

Potomac, but still, you know, it was the hot days, you can smell it. But growing up in Alexandria, it was very, very nice, and pleasing to me, because I experienced going through all parts of the city. When I was young, I used to ride my bike down here, all the way from Woods Avenue, and that's about seven miles. We used to ride and play with some of the school kids, when the school was down here, and then ride it back home.

Kerry Reed [02:06:38] It's not a, it's not an easy bike ride.

Anthony Adams [02:06:40] No.

Kerry Reed [02:06:40] Nah, that hill?

Anthony Adams [02:06:42] Let me tell you this. The good days, we were riding from Alexandria from Seminary to Woods Avenue down here, to Washington Street, get on Mount Vernon bike trail, ride down Mount Vernon, and come back.

Kerry Reed [02:06:59] That's a full day.

Anthony Adams [02:07:00] That's the twenty mile ride.

Kerry Reed [02:07:02] Oh wow.

Anthony Adams [02:07:03] It tends to be a lot. I was probably about sixteen then, and then ride back home. And me and my cousin, my cousin and I, we ride down here and get on the bike trail here, and ride to D.C. and ride across the 14th Street Bridge and go to East Potomac Park, and swim all day and probably have about three dollars in our pockets, so we can get a hamburger and a drink and then drive back on the bikes, cross the bridge, down the bike trail back up Cannonball Hill Braddock Road.

Kerry Reed [02:07:37] Yeah.

Anthony Adams [02:07:37] And go back to Seminary.

Kerry Reed [02:07:38] Okay.

Anthony Adams [02:07:38] And that's probably why I have got strong legs today because I was riding. We did a lot of walking.

Brenda Adams [02:07:44] Anthony made me think of some things too, that I didn't mention. We used to come down here as kids too. We used to go to the old skating rink [Alexandria Roller Rink] down here.

Anthony Adams [02:07:51] Oh yeah, Montgomery Street.

Brenda Adams [02:07:53] And we also used to go swimming down here at Johnson's Pool.

Kerry Reed [02:07:56] I was going to ask about that.

Brenda Adams [02:07:57] Yes, we went there. I don't know if you did, but we went.

Anthony Adams [02:08:04] I went there when I was young.

Brenda Adams [02:08:05] My cousin's father used to take us, drive us down here to the skating rink, and we'd skate for hours. And to the pool, where we'd be out there for hours.

Kerry Reed [02:08:17] Do y'all ever go to the Carver Theater or anything like that?

Brenda Adams [02:08:19] Carver Theater?

Kerry Reed [02:08:19] Queen Street, right here?

Brenda Adams [02:08:21] No.

Anthony Adams [02:08:23] My older brothers and sisters, maybe. But, and also Brenda said something about the Johnson pool, but also the Cameron Street pool back in the day.

Kerry Reed [02:08:30] Yeah?

Anthony Adams [02:08:31] We used to ride our bikes down there, and didn't have to worry about anybody stealing them. You put a lock on the bike anyway, but you swim half the day and then you ride the bike back home.

CHANGES TO VIRGINIA THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

Kerry Reed [02:08:50] So, throughout our interview today, y'all have made repeated references to the old and the new Seminary.

Anthony Adams [02:08:57] Right.

Kerry Reed [02:08:58] So, could y'all describe that process for me a little bit? What, like when, like that...

Brenda Adams [02:09:06] Transition or something?

Kerry Reed [02:09:06] Yeah, the transition. When did it become, you know, the new as opposed to the old.

Anthony Adams [02:09:10] Right when they were building T.C. Williams. That's when it came from the old to new, but even before that.....

Brenda Adams [02:09:14] When they were building the houses.

Anthony Adams [02:09:15] Yeah.

Kerry Reed [02:09:15] Okay.

Brenda Adams [02:09:16] You saw the change then, because when they were building those houses, it's not like they just tore down every house, and you just moved out and then moved back. What they would do is move people around. For us, when they actually did the process of tearing down our house, we moved into a house on King Street by Oakland Baptist Church. It used to belong to the Cravens. So we stayed there, until our new house was built. And then we moved in there, and of course at some point in time they tore that one down. And other neighbors in the neighborhood, like my cousins, they, when they got to doing their house, they moved into another house in the community which was a cousin of ours. And so, it was sort of like that. So, you kind of lived the transition. We were pretty young when they did that in the early sixties. I was probably about ten or eleven years old. So that was a big upheaval, you know, it's like, you know, as kids, you're losing what you were familiar with. But, you were doing it together as a family. So it didn't, you know, it wasn't as painful. For us it was kind of exciting. And then, you start seeing things change. You saw these new houses, you saw these paved streets, not your gravel, mud streets or dirt, you know, dirt and rocks. You saw signs go up for parking. I mean, it's just the houses sort of looked like they were bigger. Some of them were bigger, they were definitely new. And then you saw the school come up. But, you also witnessed the fact that you lost a lot too. You lost land. You lost, a lot of the greenery was destroyed. A lot of those pear trees, apple trees, and grape vines and all that stuff that we talked about, destroyed. You had less land. It was just different, but I don't think it was different in a bad way. I think it different in good way.

Anthony Adams [02:11:28] As a young boy, growing up and doing the change, I didn't like it. I like the old way. The mud pies you make on a rainy day, swinging in the trees, getting fruit and vegetables, you know, getting the fruit, playing with your buddies, and had enough sticks and wood

you could make your own bow and arrows, and have a good time. But as you got older, you liked the new house, you liked the new streets. But as a kid? Oh no, what we got to move here for? You know, that was my thing. You had everything situated, you had your cats, you had your dogs. I even had a pet mouse or something, a rat, that her cat got the chance to get to it. And, you know, I remember them good stories.

Brenda Adams [02:12:15] The same one that attacked you.

Anthony Adams [02:12:16] The same that attacked me.

Kerry Reed [02:12:16] That was a feisty cat.

Anthony Adams [02:12:18] This high, this high, and head this big.

Kerry Reed [02:12:21] Is it a Maine Coon?

Brenda Adams [02:12:22] I don't know what it was, but the doctor used to ask, my sister and I, used to ask me when I'd take it to the vet, 'What is this cat mixed with?' Because it wore a dog collar.

Kerry Reed [02:12:31] Oh my gosh.

Brenda Adams [02:12:31] It was huge.

Anthony Adams [02:12:32] Yeah, it wore a dog collar.

Brenda Adams [02:12:33] But it wasn't, we're not talking huge from fat, we're talking huge....

Kerry Reed [02:12:36] Yeah.

Anthony Adams [02:12:36] From muscle.

Brenda Adams [02:12:36] Just.....

Anthony Adams [02:12:40] He was given to my older sister from a doctor, I think it came from South America or something.

Kerry Reed [02:12:45] Oh my gosh.

Brenda Adams [02:12:45] I don't know where he came from.

Anthony Adams [02:12:46] Yeah, I mean, when I understand the word, there was something like an anasimian, something?

Brenda Adams [02:12:50] No, he wasn't anasimian.

Anthony Adams [02:12:51] He wasn't? You sure? I thought I heard that word once.

Brenda Adams [02:12:54] They said that, but he wasn't.

Anthony Adams [02:12:55] But he was a big cat, and he understood. You called his name, he would come running from down the street, and attack dogs.

Kerry Reed [02:13:05] Oh wow.

Anthony Adams [02:13:07] But I miss all that. That was in the new house, but we had always had stray cats, stray animals that got lost, she would take care of them.

Brenda Adams [02:13:21] But there were some restrictions, I mean, from the old and the new, the restrictions, where you didn't have as much place to just roam around, and go through the woods, so you lost that. And, we were still young enough to wanna do that kind of thing. And then, we lost all that natural, some of that natural beauty too, of that area. And we lost some neighbors too, because some neighbors couldn't afford to come back to the area. And some just didn't want to come back. They just left the area, so it was a strange time. You know, you were happy. It was kind of like a little bit of happiness and sadness, sadly the old, but happy with the new.

THE NEW ADAMS FAMILY HOME

Kerry Reed [02:14:06] Absolutely. So I'm curious though, was the new house that y'all came back to, was that the one that your father built or was that the old house?

Brenda Adams [02:14:14] No, the old house before that was the one that he built, that he had a bit built.

Kerry Reed [02:14:21] So what did y'all's new house look like then?

Brenda Adams [02:14:24] Oh, it's a gorgeous house.

Anthony Adams [02:14:25] Oh, yeah.

Brenda Adams [02:14:26] It's three, well, at the time we moved in, the basement wasn't finished. It was three bedrooms, one bathroom upstairs, living room-dining room, combination, a big kitchen.

Kerry Reed [02:14:35] Okay.

Brenda Adams [02:14:36] And an unfinished basement. But it was, and still a lot of property. And it was beautiful. Anthony can describe it today. The remodel.

Kerry Reed [02:14:47] What does the house look like today, Mr. Adams?

Anthony Adams [02:14:49] Four bedrooms, finished basement, and blue canyon, which is something that re-cleans the air. Takes all the, what they call it, stuff that come from the ground. That visible gas, I forgot what they called it. But, most houses have it. You have to get an inspector to check to see if you have any gas that come up from the ground. And I have the blue canyon to take care of that. We have all the central air, because we moved in the house, after we moved in from the old, it didn't have, none of the houses have air conditioning. You have window air conditioning. So there's central air, and it's been re-modeled and fenced in all the way around. And it's just a nice house, but it brings the old, one thing I gotta say is, it's a strong built house.

Kerry Reed [02:15:45] Yeah.

Anthony Adams [02:15:45] Because back then, they used real material and it's all brick and it was a tight house. So in the summer, you're gonna get warm. So, you gotta have air-conditioning. In the winter time, it stays warm in the winter, and it is cool in the summer, when you have the air conditioning on, because it's tight. And it's really a nice neighborhood

Kerry Reed [02:16:07] So how much land does the house sit on as opposed to the old house?

Anthony Adams [02:16:13] Now, it's probably about a little more than a quarter, almost a quarter if you look at the fence and the trailers, it is almost a third.

Kerry Reed [02:16:22] Okay. How much land did the old house sit on in Seminary?

Brenda Adams [02:16:26] Remember I described that at the corner with my grandmother's house, and our house was at the end, so that was a long end. That was probably over an acre.

Kerry Reed [02:16:34] Over an acre?

Brenda Adams [02:16:35] Yeah. Now.....

Kerry Reed [02:16:36] Okay, now there's like three houses you said.

Brenda Adams [02:16:39] My uncle's house was at the corner in our house. My parents house was that the bottom, and now there are three homes in between with, still at least a quarter to a third of an acre. So if you add all that together, that's probably over an acre of land between those two.

Anthony Adams [02:16:58] And then, some of the land that wasn't fenced in, behind the house by T.C. Williams, was our land too, because we had stuff going there too. And I don't know if it was part of our land or not, but it was open land. And you had a garden and probably like my sister said, about an acre and a half maybe.

Brenda Adams [02:17:17] At least, definitely at least an acre.

REMNANTS OF THE OLD NEIGHBORHOOD

Kerry Reed [02:17:21] So, you mentioned that after they started this process of building new houses, paving some of the roads, some people didn't come back because they couldn't afford it. Some people didn't want to come back, et cetera, et cetera. So once the change had occurred, how much would you say of the original neighborhood, the people in the neighborhood, were still there?

Brenda Adams [02:17:45] There were some new people that moved in, we had the Pattersons that moved in, Ms. Lillian Patterson and her husband, they moved in. We had the Leiferts move in. The Boyds that moved in up the street.

Anthony Adams [02:18:07] Yeah, the Brooks.

Brenda Adams [02:18:09] The Burkes, the Millers, near the Atkins. Let's see.

Anthony Adams [02:18:17] And Brooks.

Brenda Adams [02:18:18] They're gonna come down the street. The Brooks.

Anthony Adams [02:18:22] And the rest is cousins all the damn time.

Brenda Adams [02:18:25] Yeah, and we're kind of at least twenty-three of the people that, most of the twenty-three of the families that have those homes up there.

Anthony Adams [02:18:29] I always say it was between seventy-eight to eighty percent of the people are kin. And now, it's even changing more because the neighborhood has changed. We have white families and we have Hispanic families. And we still all get along. Everybody still got to know, and everybody nice and speak and very pleasant to be living next to.

Kerry Reed [02:18:55] So, it seems like when y'all were growing up, maybe it's hyperbolic to say that like eighty percent of the families around seem to be y'all's kin. The Roys and the Wanzers and everything like that. So, if you were to put up a percentage on it today, I guess, how would you think or how much of your kin do you think still live in the Seminary neighborhood?

Anthony Adams [02:19:19] Right now, I would say anywhere between like, probably fifty.

Kerry Reed [02:19:25] Really?

Anthony Adams [02:19:25] Yeah. Maybe even forty-eight.

Kerry Reed [02:19:28] Okay.

Brenda Adams [02:19:28] You're talking about kin.

Kerry Reed [02:19:29] Yeah.

Anthony Adams [02:19:29] Yeah, you know, cousins. I'm just saying the cousins. I'm talking about nieces and nephews and all that kind of stuff.

Brenda Adams [02:19:33] Well, let's look at the houses that aren't.

Anthony Adams [02:19:37] Well, you still have the Wanzers. Even though the family's changing, grandkids moving in. And the Belks moved back and bought the house back. That's about forty-eight percent.

Brenda Adams [02:19:52] Yeah, about fifty, fifty-five percent.

Kerry Reed [02:19:54] It's still significant then?

Brenda Adams [02:19:56] Yeah, it's still significant.

Anthony Adams [02:19:58] Yeah, but still people selling homes.

Kerry Reed [02:20:00] Naturally, yeah.

Anthony Adams [02:20:01] They're moving out of the area, because if you sell a home there, you probably have to move further out of the Alexandria area.

Brenda Adams [02:20:09] And then some people have, you know, the older ones have died and they've left it to their kids. The kids may already have a home, so they sell it.

Kerry Reed [02:20:21] So, that natural process of turnover absolutely.

Anthony Adams [02:20:21] And you know, I should like my sister said, as you retire you want to go somewhere that's less expensive. Another state. Some people like the summer, you know, if I want to go further south. And me, myself, I like cold weather. If I go, I would rather be north.

Kerry Reed [02:20:41] Yeah, my parents were the same. They retired to Maine, actually.

Brenda Adams [02:20:45] I love Maine.

Kerry Reed [02:20:46] Oh, it's gorgeous up there.

Brenda Adams [02:20:48] I know, I've been there. I love it. Now that's a place I've considered.

Anthony Adams [02:20:52] My son, my youngest son, like I said, is stationed up in Connecticut New London. And I love going up that way, and also going to Boston all the time, and Rhode Island. And my wife and I have been to Rhode Island several times, to the Naval War College, because she's with Defense, and she's been a career government, and she had an experience from the Army War College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, where she did get a degree there. And we traveled to most of the places, because she go on to TDY's [Temporary Duty Travel] military places.

Kerry Reed [02:21:31] Absolutely.

Brenda Adams [02:21:33] And, that's an important point that he just made too. Because in my career, I've traveled all over the United States. And we were just talking about Maine, I mean, Arizona, New Mexico, California, Oregon, all over the place. Wyoming. But, there's no place like Alexandria.

Anthony Adams [02:21:50] Exactly.

Brenda Adams [02:21:53] I could say it's home. But it's just, Maine came close, though. But, this is just a great place to.....

Kerry Reed [02:22:02] Oh yeah, Alexandria is gorgeous.

Brenda Adams [02:22:03] But unfortunately, the unfortunate part of it, and it probably deserves to be bought up, is that it's become so expensive, that it is hard to buy something here.

Kerry Reed [02:22:13] Oh yeah.

Anthony Adams [02:22:15] And I want to say also, I mentioned that during the travel, and I've traveled before with my former wife, with my first wife, I mostly went down to the southern area, but right now I've been married for twenty-something years, traveled all over the United States, and she traveled all through Europe with the army. And I never been over to the Europe area, but plan to go, the difference, and she described to me about the different living settings, and how the people in Europe are, and like night and day, she loved Germany, Frankfurt, Hamburg, and Stuttgart, and oh, Heidelberg, I remember Heidelberg. And my son, I heard him always talk about it, because he traveled all over too in the military. He's come up on twenty-something years, I think about seventeen years.

Kerry Reed [02:23:17] Oh, wow. So, what is something that surprises you all about present Alexandria, as opposed from when you were growing up?

Brenda Adams [02:23:29] Cost of living, that surprises me.

Anthony Adams [02:23:32] Number one.

Brenda Adams [02:23:33] Cost of living.

Kerry Reed [02:23:35] How much do you think has changed, if you had to put like a dollar figure on it?

Brenda Adams [02:23:39] A dollar figure?

Kerry Reed [02:23:40] Yeah, or just any sort of..

Brenda Adams [02:23:40] Well, for a large majority of people, it's probably unaffordable.

Kerry Reed [02:23:47] How much has the property value changed in the family home then, over time?

Brenda Adams [02:23:53] Greatly.

Kerry Reed [02:23:55] Yeah.

Anthony Adams [02:23:55] It comes with a compound interest.

Kerry Reed [02:23:58] I can imagine being on the West End there, or Seminary there, excuse me.

Anthony Adams [02:24:02] And by being close to the Alexandria Hospital, or the Seminary Hospital, back in the day, we were up and down with the Alexandria Hospital. Oh, I know one, excuse me. And the new shopping centers and the new school, you got Bishop Ireton not too far away, got St. Stephens, you got Episcopal High School, private schools, and then you got the new Alexandria school, which is really a big school.

Kerry Reed [02:24:28] Yeah, yeah.

Anthony Adams [02:24:29] And then they redone the Minnie Howard, and that's part of Alexandria High School, the new Bradlee Shopping Center, the new Felton Shopping Center. It's really expensive and really changed.

Brenda Adams [02:24:40] But, it's been changed for the better.

Anthony Adams [02:24:42] Yes.

Brenda Adams [02:24:44] I think that's what makes it great, as one of the best cities in the country.

Anthony Adams [02:24:48] And the new Chinguapin Recreation Center. That's really nice. I mean, you can't beat the pool. My granddaughter, six years old, swims every week.

THOUGHTS ON MODERN DAY ALEXANDRIA

Kerry Reed [02:25:05] So, besides for the cost of living, is there anything that you are displeased with about current Alexandria?

Anthony Adams [02:25:13] I can't really think of too much, but...

Brenda Adams [02:25:18] I can't think of anything.

Kerry Reed [02:25:20] Okay.

Anthony Adams [02:25:22] I'm satisfied.

Brenda Adams [02:25:24] I think that for me the biggest thing is the cost of living. Cost of housing.

Anthony Adams [02:25:29] Yeah, there you go.

EXPERIENCES AT CATHOLIC SCHOOL

Kerry Reed [02:25:33] So very briefly, before we move on to some of our closing questions, I was curious. So, y'all went to Catholic school. Were the nuns your teachers as well?

Brenda Adams [02:25:42] Oh yeah, they were nuns. I went for twelve years. Yeah, they were nuns at St. Joseph's. At St. Joseph's Elementary School. It was Black nuns, they were Black nuns.

Kerry Reed [02:25:58] Really?

Brenda Adams [02:25:58] Black order of nuns, yeah.

Kerry Reed [02:26:00] That's what I was curious about actually. I wanted to know.

Brenda Adams [02:26:02] They were a Black order of nuns.

Kerry Reed [02:26:03] Okay.

Brenda Adams [02:26:03] And...

Kerry Reed [02:26:05] What was the order? I'm so sorry.

Brenda Adams [02:26:06] I can't remember the order, I'll find out for you. I can remember the order, but they were a Black order of nuns. Very strict school, too. And it was small, if I recall. Not a big, huge school. Still there. The church is still there. I go there occasionally, because I belong to the Blessed Sacrament. But the Catholic school at the Blessed Sacrament, it was just the opposite. It was white nuns and white priests.

Anthony Adams [02:26:36] White priests, yes. That's what I was trying to tell you.

Kerry Reed [02:26:38] Okay.

Brenda Adams [02:26:39] I think they're the Sisters of the Oblate.

LEARNING BLACK HISTORY IN SCHOOL

Kerry Reed [02:26:43] Okay. So, when you were being taught by the Black nuns, was there any Black history in your curriculum at all, that you can recall?

Brenda Adams [02:26:52] I don't recall. I only went there for first grade. I don't recall a lot. I remember it was just basic Math and English and Religion.

Kerry Reed [02:27:03] What about at Blessed Sacrament?

Brenda Adams [02:27:05] None that I recall, but just whatever little they had in the history books.

Anthony Adams [02:27:11] Very little.

Brenda Adams [02:27:12] And it wasn't much.

Anthony Adams [02:27:14] I would say less than five percent.

Brenda Adams [02:27:16] In fact, I got my, and even at St. Mary's Academy, it wasn't a lot. I got my biggest education on Black history when I went to Howard University.

Kerry Reed [02:27:25] Naturally. Okay.

Brenda Adams [02:27:27] And that's when I learned things that actually surprised me that Black people had done.

Anthony Adams [02:27:33] I would like to say, I got my knowledge of Black history at Minnie Howard, from a Jewish teacher, I'm gonna call his name, Arnold Goldberg. Arnold Goldberg. He went outside the creek and got something that wasn't in the books. He was just teaching us, because half the class was Black. And also, that's how I learned to play chess in the seventh grade. His idea to have you to be a good thinker, and to solve problems is to play chess. And I learned how to play chess in seventh grade and became very well at it. Seventh grade, second place in the whole school. Eighth grade became first place.

Kerry Reed [02:28:26] Oh, there you go.

Anthony Adams [02:28:26] To this day, I'm a very good chess player.

Kerry Reed [02:28:30] Absolutely.

Anthony Adams [02:28:31] And I play with my son all the time, when he's in Connecticut by a computer. And friends I worked with, when I was in law enforcement, we had a little club, all the officers, we played chess. And to this day I teach my kids, all of my kids play chess. And my granddaughter, the youngest one, six years old. I'm teaching her how to play chess, because I remember that Arnold Goldberg told me it's always a thinking game.

Kerry Reed [02:29:01] Mm-hmm.

Anthony Adams [02:29:01] Now as far as Black history, one hundred percent Black history I learned, was at T.C. Williams in 11th grade, from a teacher named Mr. Weber.

Kerry Reed [02:29:13] I've heard of Mr. Weber.

Anthony Adams [02:29:14] And I cannot, I forgot his first name, but he also was from Louisiana. I think it was of Peace Parish and he was in the, went into the war, and he was stationed in Germany, he actually did some, I think with the Patton's Command.

Kerry Reed [02:29:38] Okay.

Anthony Adams [02:29:40] And All Black Division though, he was in the All Black Division. And he came back and he was lucky. He got the GI Bill to go to school, to be a teacher, and he was a teacher. Matter of fact, he even taught my older brothers and my sister and the older cousins at Parker Gray.

Kerry Reed [02:30:01] Mm, okay.

Anthony Adams [02:30:02] And then he came to T.C. Williams and taught my brother Paul four years, straight to Parker Gray. I had to go two years because they did the bussing.

Kerry Reed [02:30:10] Yeah.

Anthony Adams [02:30:11] And then he used to keep me after school sometimes, because he knew I was interested in history. I must say, I got all A's in history, because I was always into history. And he used keep me out of school, and tell me stories that I know, can tell you about different African countries that nobody knew about. Garvey, where he came from in Africa, and about Liberia and all this stuff. In the islands, and he was very well on history. So that's the first taste of Black history I got in the mid-seventies at T.C. Williams.

Kerry Reed [02:30:45] Absolutely.

Brenda Adams [02:30:47] And I just, we got a little bit, you know, there were sprinkles of it where it was important. Not a whole lot, not a whole lot.

Kerry Reed [02:30:54] Okay.

Brenda Adams [02:30:54] And that's the schools I went to. And the schools that I went to, were mostly white. I mean, most of the time I was probably the only Black in the class. Me and maybe one other person.

Kerry Reed [02:31:04] Okay.

Brenda Adams [02:31:06] In fact, in my graduating class it was only two of us.

Anthony Adams [02:31:08] Two of us.

Brenda Adams [02:31:09] From Saint Mary's Academy.

Kerry Reed [02:31:13] So, your parents obviously spent a lot of time talking about their own family history. Did they talk about Black history at all, or is it just...

Anthony Adams [02:31:22] Yeah, my father always did.

Brenda Adams [02:31:23] Yeah, he did a little bit.

Anthony Adams [02:31:25] My mother used to tell us about things that happened in the New Orleans, Louisiana area, but my father was more broad, because he went to over to the D.C. Black schools. So, he even told me back in the day, D.C. wasn't really a free state either. I mean, whatever, a district. They had slaves there. They built most of the monuments and stuff.

Kerry Reed [02:31:55] The Capitol.

Anthony Adams [02:31:56] The Capitol. White House. And that's what happened with the Seminary. That's why we, well, now they have family work there, but they also had slaves there.

Brenda Adams [02:32:07] I even took a Black history course at Howard, several, just to learn more about, you know, Black history.

Kerry Reed [02:32:14] Absolutely.

Brenda Adams [02:32:16] As electives, so...

Kerry Reed [02:32:19] I can imagine those are pretty intense, being at Howard.

Brenda Adams [02:32:22] It was very different for me, because of the type of environment of schools I went to, to go to Howard. That first year was a big adjustment, and because my whole school upbringing was so disciplined in Catholic schools, that it really helped and carried over into Howard. I mean, I didn't miss classes. I was so regimented in going to class every day. I went to class every day.

Kerry Reed [02:32:48] Absolutely.

Anthony Adams [02:32:51] And I must say, as far as the Black history, my kids got a lot of it because they went to the HBCU schools, Hampton, Old Dominion, and then Virginia Tech for Masters and George Mason and the military college. Some received two, he went to the Naval [Academy]. And he was teaching a little bit of the Black history then. And now, they're trying to take it out of schools. I don't like that.

Kerry Reed [02:33:23] They're succeeding a bit, unfortunately.

Brenda Adams [02:33:25] Yes, they are.

Kerry Reed [02:33:27] It's a problem.

Brenda Adams [02:33:27] Oh, they are. It's changing.

Anthony Adams [02:33:29] But I must say, as far as the military, some of the things they took out the Pentagon, now I'm talking about what I know because my wife works for the government. The hallway of heroes, all the Blacks, two star generals, and Chappie James, four star, General Diggs, and all them. I'm buzzy, but they're putting something back, because Jackie Robinson, you heard it on the news, they put it back.

Brenda Adams [02:33:56] They took it off.

Anthony Adams [02:33:57] He wasn't an officer, but he had a lot to do with the morale of the Black troops during World War II. And so much uproar about some of the other generals, not the Blacks, but the white generals and stuff, they put them back, so I think they're gonna put some of it back. We have a lady that's in our church, that's on the Hallways of Heroes, Gladys Collins, and I think they're gonna put hers back up there too. She was the first Black woman to have, to do the, what they call it, Department of Navy of Treasury, what do they call that? She was, I'm trying to think of that word. She was like the controller, yeah, there you go. She was the controller of the finance with the Navy. And she retired. Her picture was there, because I'd seen it twice when I did a tour through the Pentagon.

Brenda Adams [02:35:02] It's unfortunate because things have changed and they started after our time, they started doing more of the Black history studies in the schools, and probably even in Catholic schools too, I don't know. But now, it seems like we're getting ready to go a little backwards. But my hope is, that once the four years are up, things may change again, but you never know. But I think everybody should know everybody's history.

Kerry Reed [02:35:33] Of course.

Anthony Adams [02:35:34] Yes.

Brenda Adams [02:35:34] And that's basically the bottom line. Everybody should know everyone's history, because the more you know, the more you know, the better you can function and the better your understand. I mean, learning is an understanding process too. You understand more, you're more compassionate, you're more sympathetic, you are more knowledgeable.

Anthony Adams [02:35:57] And you learn from other cultures. Like we grew up Catholic, we learned about the Roman Catholic, and all the things that happened back in biblical days, and also about what's happening in different countries. And when you're exposed to the Muslims, Jewish, look at all the stuff about the Holocaust. Stuff on TV. I like watching the public broadC.asting channels, because they talk about history a lot all through Europe, the Middle East, Africa, and history of the United States, you learn. And they're cutting programs even in that arena, too They won't be able to show that, so what does all that tell you?

Brenda Adams [02:36:38] I think all history should be learned.

Anthony Adams [02:36:40] Yeah, all history.

Brenda Adams [02:36:41] You learn from history.

Kerry Reed [02:36:42] Absolutely.

Anthony Adams [02:36:43] And the Indian culture, you know.

Brenda Adams [02:36:44] There's so much positive in it.

Anthony Adams [02:36:45] The Indians, some of the Western pioneers wouldn't survive, if it hadn't been for the Indians out there. Even in Pilgrim Rock, up in the Mayflower, when all them came, they wouldn't have survived through the winter, if it hadn't been for the Indians. So you learn things from different cultures.

Kerry Reed [02:37:02] Absolutely. So, Mr. and Ms. Adams, we've been talking now for about two hours and thirty-eight minutes, and it has been an absolute blessing hearing y'all speak today.

Anthony Adams [02:37:15] Did we cover everything?

VOLUNTEER WORK AND GIVING BACK TO THE COMMUNITY

Kerry Reed [02:37:16] We got pretty close, I was actually, before we move on to our closing questions, I'm just gonna ask you, is there anything we haven't covered today that y'all would like to talk about? Anything about family history, Alexandria, careers, anything like that?

Brenda Adams [02:37:31] Well, you know, I think my education experience in Alexandria did a great job in helping me shape what I wanted to do in life, like going off to college, I mean, my school was a college prep school anyway, my high school. And I think those kind of lessons, they stay with you, you learn, and the best part about it is staying here in this area, there's so many opportunities to give back and help other people. And I do just that in a lot of the organizations I belong to. I do a lot volunteer work in this city. And I get extreme pleasure out of doing it.

Kerry Reed [02:38:10] Mm, mm.

Brenda Adams [02:38:16] That's pretty much what I can think of right now.

Kerry Reed [02:38:18] Terrific.

Anthony Adams [02:38:19] I would say, I didn't get in as much volunteer work as my sister, because I had enough volunteer work to do at home with my kids, and I was always involved with all the activities. And I'm also always involved in my church, helping out with the church, and I am also head of security in my Church.

Kerry Reed [02:38:41] That's Blessed Sacrament, right?

Anthony Adams [02:38:43] No. I am going to Warner Baptist.

Kerry Reed [02:38:44] Warner Baptist.

Anthony Adams [02:38:44] I switched over religions when I got in my early twenties.

Kerry Reed [02:38:49] Got it.

Anthony Adams [02:38:53] Yeah, we always, we're always getting into little scimmages. But I say that, I had a very good and blessed upbringing to be in Alexandria, the parents and the siblings, and the family members that everybody watched over. That old saying, "The village raised a child," we had that. Even outside the village, even if one of the white families see you do something, they knew my mom and they knew my dad, I saw your son throwing apples at rock, I mean, apples at cars going by the other day at Quaker Lane, you know? And believe me, you get in trouble.

Brenda Adams [02:39:37] And I will say to add what Anthony said, the white families that we knew here in Alexandria, they were great people. And I mean, just great people, very helpful, very kind. So it's hard for me that, you know, when you think of some of the racial things that went on in other areas, we were pretty much sheltered from that. And the whites that we did come in contact with, there wasn't that kind of problem. I mean, some of my best friends when we were in school, I told you I was single, were the white kids. I mean I did slumber parties at their house. I mean kids don't

see that kind of thing. They just see kids and friends and that's the way it was. My first experience with really seeing anything that really made my hair stand up, was during the 1968 riots. I guess it was 1968.

Anthony Adams [02:40:35] Yeah, it was '68.

Brenda Adams [02:40:36] And they had the, what, the March on Washington or something like that? And my church, Blessed Sacrament, I think if I recall correctly, opened up their basement. And I went around there to help out, you know, just to help. And I was amazed. I didn't, I mean, I couldn't comprehend what I was seeing. Because a lot of these people coming here had nothing, they were poor. And they were just here to fight for our rights. And that was probably my first experience, my first impressionable experience.

Kerry Reed [02:41:13] Yeah, absolutely.

Anthony Adams [02:41:15] And I was too young, I would play with G.I. Joes and I remember army men at that time, so it didn't really dawn on me like that. I think I was about six or seven, six. But, we had a lot of famous families we was close to. My father used to work for Congressman Ford at the time, you know, do things around, and he was good friends with Betty Ford, and Steve Ford and his sister-in-law went to T.C. Williams. I remember playing ball with him, even though he was a little older, a couple years older, just a couple of years older. We played football and baseball, and the late mayor, Kerry Donley.

Brenda Adams [02:41:58] Kerry and I went to school.

Anthony Adams [02:41:59] Yeah, they went to the school, but his brother Scott went to a school with me. Dr. [Frank A.] Carroll, the name Dr. Carroll. His daughter is married to Don Beyer, Megan.

Brenda Adams [02:42:11] Good friends.

Anthony Adams [02:42:11] Good friends and David, her brother, which was a little younger, was good friends with myself. And the older brother, Drew, was a lawyer, which is still good friends. We had a lot of people in this area that was, pretty much well-to-do, their family was famous or.....

Brenda Adams [02:42:34] Like the Huffs.

Anthony Adams [02:42:35] The Huffs.

Brenda Adams [02:42:35] My father worked with them.

Anthony Adams [02:42:40] Reverend McGee, I think he was a bishop at the time, now that, the church on that side of Seminary Road next to that house in the corner, and that house on the corner where I used to go, and play all the time with his two sons, Coco and Donald McGee. So, we had a lot of people that was in the area at the time, that we didn't know that father was in the Congress or generals that live on Bishop Lane or lawyers, Booth and T. Brooke Howard and all them guys, we didn't know all that. You know, just friends.

Brenda Adams [02:43:17] You just didn't see, I mean, even the people, you know, the whites and the Blacks, at least from my perspective and his perspective, we got along. There was a lady that had a home up on Seminary Road, her name was Kitty Carrie, Kitty Carrie.

Anthony Adams [02:43:33] Kitty Carrie, yeah.

Brenda Adams [02:43:34] They've sold that land, they've built a couple of big homes up there. She used to have horses, and my brother and I would go up there and ride the horses, Paul.

Kerry Reed [02:43:41] Oh wow.

Brenda Adams [02:43:42] Yeah.

Kerry Reed [02:43:43] Where was it?

Brenda Adams [02:43:44] They had a lot of land back up in there. Yeah, Kitty, Kitty Carrie.

Kerry Reed [02:43:48] Okay.

Brenda Adams [02:43:48] That was her name. And she had a lotta land back in there, and she had kids, and they had horses.

Kerry Reed [02:43:54] Oh, wow.

Brenda Adams [02:43:55] And, yeah, we'd go up there sometimes.

Anthony Adams [02:43:56] It was a farming company. That lady would also go up and use the horses too.

Brenda Adams [02:43:59] Oh yeah, and the Dwyers. I went to school with the Dwyers, who are actually had that big plumbing company. Lived off Seminary Road, so you just didn't see. It was a slumber party. You just didn't see some of the things that unfortunately other people saw.

Anthony Adams [02:44:20] It was very, family was very nice to us. We didn't have any problems like that. And if in high school, you might have a little argument with somebody at the school.

Kerry Reed [02:44:29] Naturally, naturally.

Anthony Adams [02:44:30] You fight, the next day you're playing. It ain't like today. It wasn't drive-bys. It wasn't no, I'm gonna get you later and throw a molotov cocktail through your window. It wasn't like all this kind of stuff. We would fight today, like me and you would fight today, probably later on in the season, we'd be down at the basketball court playing or playing touch football.

Brenda Adams [02:44:47] And I think some of that is because of our parents. Our parents were very open-minded.

Anthony Adams [02:44:52] Forgetful, you know, you forget. You know, move on.

Brenda Adams [02:44:54] People just like them.

HOPES FOR THE FUTURE

Kerry Reed [02:44:58] Absolutely. Absolutely. Okay, so I have three closing questions, and then I'll ask each of you to respond. So firstly, Ms. Adams, what do you hope for the future of Seminary?

Brenda Adams [02:45:16] I hope that the history continues. I would love to see the community grow. But, I'd love to see some of the people who are there, stay there. I always say, you know, especially in Alexandria, you sell the property, you know, you may have a hard time buying back, because it's so expensive here, but I just like to see that community continue.

Kerry Reed [02:45:41] Absolutely.

Brenda Adams [02:45:43] It was just such a wonderful place to grow up.

Kerry Reed [02:45:47] And you, Mr. Adams, what do you hope for the future of Seminary?

Anthony Adams [02:45:49] I'd like to ditto on what my sister just said, like to see some of the family members that moved away, hopefully can move back and buy the land back, which they had one cousin that did that. And also, to see it continue to shine and keep the history intact, and let the younger generations know the area they're at, that move there, that this is a rich history. And also, be able to share, I understand, one time we were supposed to be talking to a 'TC Williams history class, to tell them what this school is sitting on, of Black heritage families' areas, and also see the city continue to do more, as far as helping some of the less fortunate people. Because you have people right a couple blocks away, and these are, what they call low income housing. And also on Del Ray. That's what I see, I see a lot of them in Del Ray and I just like to see it continue to strive and build and continue to do what they do best.

THE IMPORTANCE OF FAMILY HISTORY

Kerry Reed [02:47:10] Absolutely. And then Mr. Adams, what do you think is the importance of knowing family history, knowing your family history?

Anthony Adams [02:47:21] In order to know your future, you have to know your past. And the more you know about your past, it brings you a knowledge, a higher standing to keep up, do good work and make a legacy. And you wanna not, like the old family members used to say, you don't wanna put blame or blemish on the family name. You want to keep going forward and continue to strive and live a well-lived life.

Kerry Reed [02:47:52] Absolutely. And you, Ms. Adams, the importance of knowing family history?

Brenda Adams [02:47:55] I think it's always important to know where you came from, and what your family's like, and you'd be surprised. People don't think of it this way, but a lot of times, medical things come out of knowing your history. For example, you know, you may have something and say, 'Oh God, nobody in my family has that.' And you may find out that a distant relative had it, and another cousin had it or this, that, and the other. So, there's history in knowing your family for a variety of reasons, medical, education-wise. And then just knowing where you came from, and what your people went through. And appreciate, that you're standing on the backs of a lot of people who suffered for you to get where you are today.

Kerry Reed [02:48:39] Mm-hmm.

Brenda Adams [02:48:41] And also what Anthony said, something I always say anyway, is that you can't move forward, if you don't know your past. Because you don't know what you're moving forward from.

Anthony Adams [02:48:52] And you have to continue to glance like you're driving a car. You're always looking forward, but you got that rear mirror to always look behind you. Every now and then, you need to take a look back. And there'll be something you might see, that can propel you more into the future and prepare you.

Brenda Adams [02:49:13] It just made me think of something really important. I remember when my father passed away, and it was very upsetting for me. Very. And I remember, because I had moved back home, and lived there for eleven more years while he was alive, as an adult from thirty to forty. And I think those were the best times for me, because I was more mature then. And I learned a lot from him, a whole lot. We used to have talks all the time. And my mother was sickly and I was helping with her, and I remember when he passed I was so upset, and one of the first things that hit me was like, 'What am I going to do?' He was my best advisor, and the more I thought about it, I realized this: he had already taught me everything he knew. He had already taught me everything that I needed to know to survive. And that's one of the memories I have of him. I just fell apart, like, 'What am I going to do?' You know, got my mother to take care of financially and whatever, and then myself, and I was like, 'What am going to I do?' And I realized, he had already taught me everything I needed.

Kerry Reed [02:50:23] Absolutely. Absolutely.

Anthony Adams [02:50:25] I like to piggyback on it, because I heard it from him directly, when he was on the sick bed that, sometimes my sinus is kicking in, plus I break up a little, you know, in my throat when I talk about this, he was always saying, 'You and your sister gotta lead the family,' because if we spend more time with them and learn a lot. And my mother told me the same thing. But I remember his last words. He used to tell me, 'Y'all stay close. Because you have the strength and she had the knowledge. That's what she is. You always have the strength and she has the knowledge and together you all unstoppable, unbeatable.' And going back to my brother's passing, I drove the limousine with the family. None of my other brothers could do it. And my father was good friends with Lindsay Lexus, well, Lindsay Callick at the time. And they used to fight at the limousine. And they said, 'Your father always talked about you. You can drive the car.' I said, 'Yeah, I can drive a car.' I drove vehicles for the state, you know. And also I did the same for my mother, my brother, my father, my brother first, my father, then my mother. I was able to get a limousine, a big limousine, and have the family driving it in. So, that was the strength he was talking about. And she was doing most of the paperwork.

Brenda Adams [02:52:03] Crying through everything.

Anthony Adams [02:52:04] Yeah, crying through everything, but also doing the paperwork. And the whole time, I was showing the strength, because I didn't show any reaction in the family. Even the kids, the grandkids. And that's the way he taught me to be a soldier.

Kerry Reed [02:52:22] Absolutely. And then lastly, Miss Adams, if you could hold on to one memory forever, what would it be?

Brenda Adams [02:52:36] One of my best memories is when I moved back home, when my father definitely needed somebody to help him. And I remember my roommate saying, 'Oh, I got this new townhouse. Are you coming? You can still rent.' I said, 'No, I'm moving back home. My parents need me.' And I went back home, and that was probably one of the happiest times of my life, because he was happy that I was there to help him. And they both were, really. And it was a time when I was mature enough, at thirty, to really understand everything that he was telling me, and the reasons why. And it was just a happy time. And then dealing with my brothers and sisters again, from not so far away, after three years of Maryland.

Anthony Adams [02:53:24] I was the one to visit you.

Brenda Adams [02:53:25] But one of the memories that I really hold on to, is the one I told you about when I had that epiphany of, 'What am I gonna do? I just lost my best advisor.' And I really didn't, because he had already taught me everything.

Kerry Reed [02:53:39] Of course, of course.

Brenda Adams [02:53:41] And then the fondness of just seeing them smile, just moving back, and just doing things for them. Realizing that they had worked so hard with eight kids.

Anthony Adams [02:53:50] That's right.

Brenda Adams [02:53:51] I mean, back breaking work to keep the family going, and then to come back as an adult, having finished college, and having a little bit of extra to help out, and just doing things, and saw them smile, just was good for me. Those are good times.

Kerry Reed [02:54:11] Absolutely.

Brenda Adams [02:54:11] Every time it's good. Those were even better, when you can give back.

MOST CHERISHED MEMORIES OF ALEXANDRIA

Kerry Reed [02:54:17] And you Mr. Adams, if you could hold on to one memory forever, what would it be?

Anthony Adams [02:54:24] Just some long talks with my parents. Even when I did something wrong back in the day, they wouldn't, they tell you something that'd stick in your mind. There's always some kind of way they put it, way they'd put something. Like my mother always say, 'If you continue to be bad to your friends, and feel like you're gonna be fighting or playing or something like that, it'll come back to you later,' and all that stuff, and I thought about it. And so, it made me think positive all the time. They always had good wisdom, as far as treating people right. If you treat people right, karma come back, people gonna treat you right. And I've been blessed. Never had really a problem, never had any problem with the law, because I was in the law enforcement and never was into drugs or drinking, just by listening to what they was telling me. My mother didn't smoke or drink. My father smoked and he, you know, had a little spirit. But the thing is, they always told you right. Number one words, 'Do as I say, not as I do,' because he didn't ever want me to smoke cigarettes. And I would also say, just growing up in a family, you know, in a sibling, a two-parent family, you don't see that today. Most of my friends didn't grow up with a father and mother. It's just amazing how, back in the day, the families had little or nothing and they stuck it out. When you say 'I do,' hey, until death do you part, that's what they meant, and that's what they did. They stayed together all my lives. So, we saw that togetherness, and that also kept the family together. You know, we might not talk as much or visit much, but if the call come out, it's like the lion calling and the pack is coming. Or the wolf, I meant to say the wolf. The pack is coming, so you better be aware what's gonna come.

Kerry Reed [02:56:36] Absolutely.

Anthony Adams [02:56:36] And that's gonna be stick, close family.

Brenda Adams [02:56:39] Yeah, they did teach us to stick together. And, we are very close brothers and sisters.

Kerry Reed [02:56:45] That's true.

Brenda Adams [02:56:46] We made bicker, but let one call. Let one call and need something.

Anthony Adams [02:56:48] We bicker, but we're there.

Brenda Adams [02:56:53] I have to put ramparts up sometimes.

CLOSING REMARKS

Kerry Reed [02:56:57] Well, Mr. and Mrs. Adams, thank you so much for speaking with me today. It's been an absolute blessing hearing you talk for the past three hours. It's has been fabulous.

Brenda Adams [02:57:02] Thank you so much. It's a pleasure to share our views and history with you.

Anthony Adams [02:57:07] I really appreciate it, and the time do fly, and I was looking at my phone.

Kerry Reed [02:57:14] It was wonderful to meet you too.

Anthony Adams [02:57:15] I didn't even pay attention to the time, because we were really bringing back memories, and just talking, and the way you put the question is so nice and understandable where we can react. I know my voice go up and down, over the years being a drill sergeant in corrections and all that stuff, you're yelling, so my voice goes up and down with the sinuses coming around.

Kerry Reed [02:57:35] Don't worry about it. Again, thank you both so much

Brenda Adams [02:57:37] Thank you so much.

Anthony Adams [02:57:37] Thank you.