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Tom Crosby Oral History Collection
Rosa Jeter Oral History Interview

Interviewee
Jeter, Rosa, 1940-

Interviewer
Crosby, Tom, 1940-

Date
June 14, 2007

ID Number
CROS 011

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Scope and Background Note
In this oral history interview, Rosa Jeter discusses her educational experiences at Tinker Creek Elementary, McBeth Elementary, and Sims High schools in Union County, South Carolina, commenting specifically on school lunches, closings, study habits, and her walking several miles to school. Jeter also discusses her husband Frank Jeter and his work for the federal government, which enabled their family to live abroad for several years in Mexico, the Philippines, and Crete. One of 11 children, Rosa Savage Jeter was born in 1940, in Union County, South Carolina. Tom Crosby interviewed Rosa Jeter on June 14, 2007. Interview covers Jeter's education at Tinker Creek and McBeth Elementary Schools (of the town of Whitmire, S.C.) from the late 1940s to the mid-1950s and at Sims High School from 1955 to 1959.
Tom Crosby: Today is June 14, 2007 and I am at the residence of a former high school classmate of mine. Your name please?

Rosa Savage Jeter: Rosa (Savage) Jeter.

TC: Rosa Savage Jeter. And at this time your date of birth?

RJ: Twelve twenty-one forty.

TC: Twelve twenty-one forty. We are in a community in Union County known as Santuck or the Carlisle general area. What was your elementary school?

RJ: My elementary school was Tinker Creek.

TC: Tinker Creek.

RJ: It was a one-room school.

TC: Located in the southern part of Union County. How many rooms, I’m sorry, it had one room?

RJ: One room.

TC: And did you have another person in your class?

RJ: No.

TC: You were always the only person?

RJ: I was always the only person in my class up until I went to Sims High, Jr. High, the old Jr. High. I think it was seventh grade when we started there or eighth.

TC: As I said, we are classmates. We actually went to Macbeth after the seventh grade.

RJ: Macbeth, yeah.

TC: And that was located in Union.
RJ: Union, yes.
TC: Okay. And then after the eighth grade we went to Sims High School.
RJ: Sims.
TC: Now when you say Sims High School we are referring to the first building of Sims High School.
RJ: The old building.
TC: Yes. There were two buildings for Sims High School in existence. The first building was built in 19, should I say it was opened in 1927, and it was a Rosenwald School. The reason it was a Rosenwald School is because it got some funds from the Julius Rosenwald Fund in 1926 to help build that building. The amount that was received from the Rosenwald Fund was twenty-one hundred dollars and it was actually in 1925 that they got that money and started building. And it got thirty-seven thousand nine hundred from the county and the state and according to an article I read, the larger portion of that thirty-seven thousand nine hundred came from tax levy. Now we were in the first building at Sims High School during part of our ninth grade year. Do you remember how long we were in that building?
RJ: I’m not too sure but I know we moved. I don’t know if it was in the first half of the year or what.
TC: It was in the second half.
RJ: Second, yeah. I know we moved there.
TC: February.
RJ: Yes, into the new building.
TC: February of, I guess that was 1956.
RJ: Well, I know we graduated in ’59.
TC: That was ’56.
RJ: Yeah.
TC: Then we went to a new school, Sims High School, and it opened in the spring of 1956.
RJ: Yeah, and we graduated in ’59.
TC: And we graduated in ’59.
RJ: We were the first complete class to graduate high school that had went four years.
TC: Yeah. Now back to elementary level, we talked about your school but the name of that school was Tinker Creek.
RJ: Tinker Creek.
TC: T-I-N-K-E-R. So how did your teacher get around to teaching all the different classes?
RJ: The teacher taught every class.
TC: Every subject?
RJ: Every subject, every class, every subject and by myself being the only person in my class, I could only get so much because if there were two people.

TC: So much per day?

RJ: Per day, yes, so much time per day and each day we’d get a different subject because you know then the majority of things that we had was reading, writing, and math. They called it arithmetic or whatever. And I know that we started out with a Dick and Jane book and then we moved on up. My hardest thing that I found in life were tests because I felt that once I got to the high school, you know, integrated in with the other kids, I had to study more because each one of those kids had learned more material in those books than I did.

TC: You think so?

RJ: I felt so. I mean that’s me, you know, especially growing up I had to really put forth effort in every class.

TC: At the high school level?

RJ: At the high school level, because I did not get, now in life I see that I did not get the basic background in grammar school and I feel that that’s where you get your start is in grammar school.

TC: Now, for example, comparing your school to mine, we were the same general geographical area. My school was really only about four miles from yours. However, my school had five rooms and we had a grade level teacher for those rooms for the most part. So the first grade had a first grade teacher and the second grade had a second grade teacher and so forth.

RJ: And where the school that I as in we only had one teacher for all those six grades, up to the sixth grade.

TC: Seventh grade

RJ: Seventh grade, yeah.

TC: Now so during the day when the teacher would give certain amount of time.

RJ: To each grade.

TC: To each grade. About how long do you think she would give attention to each grade, any idea the amount of time, maybe fifteen minutes, maybe thirty?

RJ: Maybe fifteen minutes, not thirty, maybe fifteen to each grade because you had the day, okay. We had lunch, which we had to prepare ourselves. We had a wooden stove.

TC: Okay, now when you say lunch that you had to prepare yourself, I assume you mean that you had to bring your lunch from home or?

RJ: What I can remember because you know a lot of first grade and second grade you don’t remember.

TC: I’m referring to all the way up to the seventh grade.

RJ: Seventh grade.

TC: Give me those experiences.
RJ: Those experiences.
TC: In terms of food.
RJ: They started giving us food. What I remember most was raisins. We had so many raisins.
TC: Apples, oranges.
RJ: We cooked raisins on the wooden stove and that’s what we ate, raisins.
TC: How were they cooked, in water?
RJ: Water, raisins in water, and we had raisins.
TC: In water and they became soft?
RJ: Yes and we would eat the raisins probably with, I don’t know if we ate them with oatmeal or grits or what but I remember all those raisins because they would be.
TC: You had grits?
RJ: They would bring us raisins by the case.
TC: But now did you ever have grits?
RJ: Not to my knowledge that we had grits but raisins.
TC: What else was cooked on the stove?
RJ: Beans. As we were having class we were cooking beans. Now later in the school, as I remember, they built a kitchen and they would prepare.
TC: Did they call it a lunchroom?
RJ: A lunchroom. But we did not eat in there. We would eat outside, you know, picnic style.
TC: Did you have a table out there?
RJ: Out there, yeah, and we also had the outhouse. In other words, the girls went this way and the boys went that way outside, went to the outside.
TC: Do you remember any other kinds of foods cooked on the stove? Now you were saying, in reference to the stove, that was the same stove that?
RJ: That we heated the room.
TC: The rooms or room?
RJ: Room, one room, but we did have desks, you know, like little old desks, you know. But that was the stove that heated the room, cooked the food, and everything.
TC: So at times the teacher would stir the food?
RJ: Or some of the.
TC: Students?
RJ: Some of the, you know, larger students or whatever.
TC: So what would you be doing when the teacher was working with the other students?
RJ: Well, we had to study on our own.
TC: You were supposed to be studying?

RJ: Studying on our own and as I think now it’s like how much could I learn on my own, just one child with one book, no other one there to talk to or compare or whatever.

TC: If I may make a personal reference, I know what you’re talking about. I remember a system when I was in school, fifth or sixth grade. She would have me to assist other students at times. I think Frances did the same thing, Frances Tucker, a classmate also.

Now that we’re talking about it, something else that I remember that I’ve never forgotten, when we were in 5th or 6th grade as teaching strategies it’s most likely that you may have seen it from your teacher to that one-room school. Do you remember learning the times tables?

RJ: Oh, yes.

TC: She would have me and I remember the same area on the blackboard, the left corner of the blackboard she made me a string and I guess something that held the chalk and the end of the string is where the chalk was. I would put chalk at the end of a string and hold the opposite end of the string and make a circle and then [ ] as you were learning let’s say the twos, put it in the center and then point to the numbers on the clock. I remember that. So those are two of those teaching strategies that she used when I was in school. So do you remember something similar?

RJ: Well, I remember the time tables. I know we had to learn those time tables. And you know, by me having sisters and brother, a sister older and a brother, then we could at least learn the time tables together, you know, like at home or something like that.

TC: You had an older sister?

RJ: Gladys.

TC: Also in the same school at the same time as you? Did she not, Gladys was about what, two years ahead?

RJ: Just about one year.

TC: So did the teacher ever ask Gladys to help you in the school?

RJ: Not that I know of in the school. I don’t remember that.

TC: But she did help you at home?

RJ: Yes, we helped each other at home. And another thing that we used to do was they had night school for the parents, fathers, parents because like our father could not read or write. And they would give them books.

TC: Excuse me, now you said night school, I may not have heard what you said. You said night school for the fathers.

RJ: Fathers.

TC: Now the mothers could have gone? They didn’t emphasize the mothers?

RJ: They didn’t emphasize the mothers. They emphasized the fathers so that they could learn how to write their name because they were going out on jobs. And as we grew up we would have to teach our fathers like the time tables, how to write, especially at night,
you know, with these books. And they had the same books that we had like the little Dick and Jane and different ones and the time tables and they were teaching them this too so that they could go out and get a job because they did not go to school.

TC: Not very much.

RJ: Not very much. Maybe after the first or second grade, I think what they’re telling us, once they got big enough to work the fields.

TC: The boys?

RJ: The boys had to stop school.

TC: Do you remember during any of your schooling, elementary level, do you remember how long you may have gone to school, was it a month or months?

RJ: Yes, we would go to school during the winter months when it was cold. In the spring we were out of school to plant the fields.

TC: What months?

RJ: Oh, say around Easter.

TC: April or so?

RJ: April or so, the spring of the year, our school would be out and we would have to go and work the fields. And then after the field would get in, the plants would get the field and everything, then we’d go back to school in the summer, a lot of the summertime.

TC: So somewhere between April and I think it was around June or July.

RJ: May, June, somewhere like that.

TC: You were out of school?

RJ: Well, we were from April to say, yeah, like say June, May, June, we were out of school to get everything, the cotton in the fields and the corn and the hoeing and whatever it took and then once we’d get that in we would go back to school.

TC: Somewhere around?

RJ: In the summertime, July or August.

TC: July for about four or five weeks?

RJ: Yeah, a couple of months maybe and then in the fall of the year we were out again because we had to gather up the crops.

TC: Now those months were?

RJ: Like September or August and September, maybe October, and we would have to gather the crops and then we would go back again until the spring. This is how our school was.

TC: Yeah, all of them were more or less the same.

RJ: You know there are some things that you remember that sticks in your mind. And one of the things that I remember that I think was one of my hang ups is that the white kids would ride by us on the bus and be laughing at us.
TC: We had the same.
RJ: You had the same?
TC: Yeah.
RJ: That was a hang up for me, you know. Here I am out in the field.
TC: Throwing paper.
RJ: Or whatever and they’re laughing at you and they’re on the bus going to school and we had to walk.
TC: And you know, do you agree that many of them, we knew how things were, white folks, white as well as black?
RJ: Yeah.
TC: And many of those white kids really had no more than we did.
RJ: No, they didn’t.
TC: The parents.
RJ: Some didn’t have as much as we did.
TC: Some families.
RJ: Yes. Because like my mother and them, they always say that they wouldn’t share the milk or whatever they had in the fields, you know, the milk and the butter and they were sent to the house to get a pound of butter or however they, you’re right.
TC: The whites?
RJ: The whites, they didn’t have any more than we did.
TC: Many of them didn’t.
RJ: Many of them, some of them did. And then we were working some of their farms and as I tell my children and grandchildren now, we all have hang ups and I have a big one. My father would work their fields and he’d get the money, even though we had to pay for.
TC: The little money.
RJ: The little money, even though we had to pay for our books or clothes or whatever because I’m the second oldest so you know what that was like, and we didn’t see the money. So here I am sixty-six years old and I still have that hang up because I tell my kids and my grandkids.
TC: Excuse me, which hang ups, those negatives, those bad memories?
RJ: Those bad memories of him getting my money.
TC: You mean the white man?
RJ: No, my father.
TC: Getting?
**RJ:** My money from the white man. I didn’t get paid even though I did the work. They would pay my father the little money that we made, yeah, and they would pay him.

**TC:** You’re talking indirect money? You’re referring to the money that you should have gotten?

**RJ:** Should have gotten, yeah, because they’ll make the deal with the father or whatever and want us to work but we never got the money and to me that’s in this head today.

**TC:** Yeah, I guess we just have to, we can’t forget it.

**RJ:** No, we can’t.

**TC:** But we have to, how do I say it, we have to I guess just kind of let it be, you know, the best we can.

**RJ:** Yeah.

**TC:** Do you agree with that?

**RJ:** I tell my kids and my grandkids about that now and I say I believe in if you work for money, if you go out and work at a job, that’s your paycheck. Even though you have to support the household, I think it should be your choice, you know, because every home has rules. I believe in rules, right, and every house has rules and everyone should support that house but.

**TC:** You should be rewarded.

**RJ:** With your own paycheck. Is that right?

**TC:** Oh, I agree, yeah. If we may go back to elementary school, what were some of the games that may have been played?

**RJ:** I think we played more or less the traditional things. We did jump rope or hopscotch, which you say you don’t remember.

**TC:** Describe the hopscotch. I guess that’s of course H-O-P-S-C-O.

**RJ:** Like you skip or whatever. You draw a circle.

**TC:** It might be S-C-O-O-P. I think it might be spelled that way.

**RJ:** Yeah, it may, okay.

**TC:** Or it might be S-C-O-T-C-H.

**RJ:** On the ground, anywhere you draw.

**TC:** Some squares.

**RJ:** Some squares and you jump them. You throw the rocks or whatever you’re playing with and then you have to jump through them or hop through them.

**TC:** You say you throw the rocks.

**RJ:** Whatever you got to play with.

**TC:** Oh, you would throw it into the square?

**RJ:** The square.
TC: And then jump where the rock is?
RJ: Yeah, jump, you know, around and whatever on one leg.
TC: Is there another game you remember?
RJ: Okay, I said hide and seek. You know everybody played hide and seek. What is it, pick-up sticks, you know, see how many you could pick up.
TC: At one time?
RJ: Yeah. We didn’t stay in the house like the kids today because we didn’t have TV.
TC: I’m referring to games as school.
RJ: Yeah, that’s what we would do, different types of games like that.
TC: Now do recall having school programs?
RJ: Okay, our school clothes were, a lot of them.
TC: Not clothes, but at the end of school you would have programs?
RJ: Oh, yes.
TC: When school was closing.
RJ: We also had May Day. Do you remember that?
TC: Yeah, do you want to describe May Day?
RJ: We had the pole.
TC: Wrap the pole?
RJ: Yes. Now I know that was one thing that we did. We had the May Day pole. And then we had the school closing and during school, you know, we all had to learn things like recite something or do something or whatever. One of the things they did make us do, they did make us learn a lot of things by memory, even in the church, we had to say verses. Oh, even at home you had to say a Bible verse and the Lord’s Prayer was daily. You didn’t go to bed at night without saying the Lord’s Prayer.
TC: Now the school closing, this was a one-room school, were parents invited?
RJ: Yeah. Everybody, you know, we had a program like a regular program, like you say singing.
TC: Or maybe a little play?
RJ: A play or poems or something, which the kids made up.
TC: Now the school closing program was held inside?
RJ: The building, the one-room building, that’s all we had. We didn’t have an auditorium.
TC: So when the parents came that room was quite crowded?
RJ: Yes, but the parents sat in those little desks we had. We didn’t.
TC: I see. Okay now, did you ever have any activities to raise money for the school?
RJ: I don’t remember that.
TC: You don’t remember it, okay.
RJ: Because we were there at that little one-room school down on Santuck Road and what could we get? We couldn’t get anything. Now the teacher I had, one was Mary Ruth Jennings, who barely had a high school education herself. From what I understand they.
TC: If I may comment, add something. She did have a high school diploma. She finished Sims High and then she went to Allen University I think for one or two years..
RJ: What I heard was that they went like on a weekend or summer or something. And then the teacher that I had the longest, her name was Lonnie Beatty and she was an old lady and she lives out towards where Dora Martin lives now. Now I had her the longest and at the end we had some lady. I don’t know where she came from but she had a little boy and that was the last teacher I remember having. And I don’t remember her name now.
TC: That wasn’t Miss Moment?
RJ: No, Miss Moment never taught down there.
TC: I see. So since it was a one-room school, she was teacher and principal?
RJ: Principal, she was everything, oh, yeah.
TC: Okay, but you don’t remember any other teaching, manners in which she taught?
RJ: No. You have to understand that you’re teaching up to sixth grade. What can you do? How could you teach? And this is my thing about testing. I don’t think we were properly tested and I found once I got out into the world and had to compete with other people, and they knew how to take a test. I was a worker bee, you know, get the job done. That’s how we grew up, getting the job done. But in order to get the promotion, you had to pass the test as well.
TC: If we can go back if I may to Sims High School. You said to do a good bit of studying.
RJ: I had to study. When we came home in the evening I had to get to the books. I had to hit the books because the other kids seems like, you know, you guys had one teacher per whatever, and here only me in a one-room class I had to study to keep up with all the other kids. And I mean I was an average student and I felt that was good. I was never an A student.
TC: And you didn’t fail.
RJ: I didn’t fail anything but I studied. At home I would study.
TC: But maybe you really got more than you think you got in that one room school.
RJ: Maybe I have.
TC: Yeah, but I can understand why you feel that you may not have gotten as much attention as you should have over a period of time, adequate attention I’m talking about. But I’m sure she tried to.
RJ: Yes, they did.
TC: They did their best.

RJ: Yeah, but what I did, which I think, I kept preparing myself. Like even when Frank and I, you know, I had three kids. I had my kids when I was twenty-five. Frank and I had three kids because we got married right out of high school. Now when I, at first we wasn’t going to get married. He was going to go to college in Baltimore to a teacher’s college. I think that’s about the only thing they had. And I was going to work but I was going to night school to make up for some of the, to catch up on some of the things that I did not learn during high school. But then we got married because his father didn’t send him to college. He didn’t get to college so we came home and got married. But even at that, I kept studying. Like in the military I would take night classes, adult classes, English and math and that’s how I kept up. I was a teacher’s aid with the kids. I did volunteer work. I did all this to keep up with other people because I was with all these people that I had to, I felt that I had to be on their level and to be on their level I had to study. And by Frank being in the military and he had one of the highest clearance there is and especially for in the ‘60s to get a clearance like he had, a black man. You know, I have to be with these people on their level. I had to be able to be a wife and a mother and a partner, a social partner, so I had to learn how to do that. And so also, like I said, I was a teacher’s aid in school and did a lot of volunteer work with the Red Cross. I was with the Wives Club where we went out into the community and visit and then I went to work once we came back to the states. And I started out as a sales clerk but I worked my way up to a supervisor because I also worked and went to school at night and took care of my three kids. And I worked there until five years I got up as high as I could go. I worked Job Corps for eighteen months and I did what I did was carry kids shopping because in the Job Corps they gave them at that time a hundred and twenty-five dollars for clothing.

TC: So now your children and grandchildren have and are doing well, is that right? Would you like to indicate something about your children and grandchildren?

RJ: Okay, first I went to work. I went to work for the government as long as Frank retired and went back into the agency and he ended up as a deputy supervisor for blacks, deputy chief. Okay, I was a contract specialist, contract officer, so I always put forth I say more effort than anybody else because I had to study to get the certificates and all that. My kids went to school on military bases, which I think they were sheltered a lot, but they got that one-on-one attention.

TC: From their parents?

RJ: No, from their teachers because on a military base you don’t have that many kids. Like the last place we were stationed on the Island of Crete four years, there were only a hundred military people. That’s wives, children, military, they were I don’t know what. The base was only a mile so that meant the kids got more one-on-one attention.

TC: So how about their education?

RJ: Okay, my oldest son is an engineer. We went to Arundel. Then majority of the time it was more white than black. By being on the military installation they were with more white than black. We were only a few. He decided that he was going to go to Bowie. He went to a five-year program, Bowie and University of Maryland. He also got a work study program. He got
his clearance and got into the agency into a work study program where he would work so much and they would pay. Then they paid for his master’s at GW, George Washington.

**TC:** He has a master’s?

**RJ:** He has a master’s. He’s a big *(unintelligible)*. Don’t ask me what he do.

**TC:** And then you have another son?

**RJ:** Son, yeah. He worked with different contracts on different security programs, my oldest one. My middle one refused to go to school but I guess you’d say I was from the old school.

**TC:** Going to college?

**RJ:** Yeah, he refused to go to college. He ran track and things like that and if he didn’t keep his grades up he didn’t get to run track. That’s the thing for the outside. And he went into the Navy, did quite well for someone that didn’t want to go to school.

**TC:** And you have a daughter?

**RJ:** Yes, my daughter operates all the computers for the *(unintelligible)* at The Naval Academy.

**TC:** That’s all your children?

**RJ:** That’s the children. My grandsons, I have two grandsons. My son married a Pilipino. They have two boys, Mark and Frankie. Mark just graduated last week from Arundel High School with all kinds of awards. He received a full scholarship to the University of Maryland-Baltimore County, two thousand dollar incidentals and a senatorial.

**TC:** The reason I asked you about your children, well several, one is because of your background, our background, and the attention of the teachers that we had it equipped us to want to do well.

**RJ:** Want to do because we knew. Like my middle son is an ophthalmologist technician and his specialty is laser eye surgery.

**TC:** And I’m sure you agree that those teachers did their best to motivate us.

**RJ:** Yes and we came along in the ‘60s, like after the ‘60s, you know, the Martin Luther King era and we wanted. Once we left this little area we saw what was out there and what we could do, so that’s what we did. Well, we still had that motivation from our parents that that instilled in us an education.

**TC:** And from our teachers.

**RJ:** Teachers and everything.

**TC:** And don’t forget grandparents.

**RJ:** Grandparents because they knew that without an education we wasn’t going to get anywhere. And that little high school education, even at the time they said when my parents were.

**TC:** They thought it was something great, and it was.
**RJ:** Yeah, my parents said with us I will make sure you get through high school but the rest you have to do on your own because there was eleven of us.

**TC:** They wanted more but they couldn’t afford more.

**RJ:** They couldn’t afford more.

**TC:** Now do you have any concluding comments that you’d like to make, maybe something that we haven’t talked about or something in general that you’d like to say, any concluding comments?

**RJ:** My concluding comment is that I am back here. Frank and I left here at eighteen and nineteen.

**TC:** Left South Carolina?

**RJ:** Left South Carolina at eighteen and nineteen and we’re back. We came back, retired. We both are retired. My sister and I kept a portion of our grandfather’s land so we had the land, you know. We decided to come back just to get out of the hustle and bustle because we’d been in it for all that time. I don’t see any change.

**TC:** With reference to what kind of things when you say you don’t see any change?

**RJ:** I don’t see a change in the attitude of the white and most of the blacks. Maybe I should put it this way. Their mentality hasn’t changed, maybe because I’ve been a lot of places. My first assignment was the Philippines. These are poor people but they take care of each other. Their families stick together. They take care of each other and they want more. They take what we throw away as trash, they use as everything.

**TC:** How, if I may, how about have you seen any change socially or interactions between the races?

**RJ:** Yes. To me, maybe this is kind of a negative statement because there are whites, boys and white girls going together everywhere, but it seems to me like they feel like they have to have a white girl.

**TC:** You’re talking about the blacks?

**RJ:** The black boys feel like they have to have a white girl. They don’t respect their own. Have you noticed that?

**TC:** I do see more black guys with white girls now than in the past. That is true. I think it’s a two pronged thing. (unintelligible) not totally acceptance of some whites towards blacks, not all of them, but some of them, okay. And then another factor involved in it too is that these kids are growing up together in an integrated society that we didn’t have and that is an added factor. But I still think it’s a psychological thing too.

**RJ:** Because it was taboo for us.

**TC:** For us (unintelligible) and they know it. They’ve heard about it.

**RJ:** And that’s what they use.

**TC:** I think it’s a curiosity factor too on both sides.
RJ: The girls and the guys.
TC: That accounts for some of that.
RJ: Yeah. See and I also lived in Greece on the Island of Crete for four years, okay. I’ve been to Texas, Mexico.
TC: You’ve had a lot of exposure.
RJ: I’ve had the exposure.
End of interview