



In collaboration with
Alicia Charemon Keyes,
Descendant of Piney Woods Free Union

Date: March 26th, 2023

Interviewer(s): Rachel Kamis

00:00	Rachel Kamis	Quick reflexes. Just start by, I want to hear a bit about you. Can you just tell me about yourself?
	Alicia Keyes	Oh, my name is Alicia Keyes. I live in Williamston, North Carolina. This is my home where I was raised. I was born in Windsor but I was raised here in Piney Woods up until the age of 18. I left to go to school at the age of 18. And I've been living in Williamston ever since which is only about 25 minutes from here.
	Rachel Kamis	Not too far.

Alicia
Keyes

Not too far. This is home. I was raised here, on the farm with my grandparents: William Joseph Keyes and Rosalee Boston Keyes; it was a hog farm. I remember when I was a little girl we lived in an older home – back in the 70s – it was a wood home and it is actually still standing. It had an original outhouse, which is actually still standing today. And what I remember the most is going in the fields, running barefoot in the sand and the dirt. Helping them ... cause I was a little tiny thing so ... with odds and ends. With pick up, because we had different farm products that we were doing. So if it was corn, you would help manually pick corn with your hands. Manually. If it's cucumbers, you'll manually pick cucumbers with your hands. Everything was done by hand at that time when I was small. Around about the age of nine ... between nine and 11.

That's the kind of things that we would do. We weren't the type that did a whole lot of playing. Because it was a farm. So we did a lot of chores. And we had cows and chickens and pigs and goats. A lot of them. Hard work which I'm glad that I got a chance to do because it was a structure, a discipline, that helped. A lot of children are growing up this day don't even know anything about that. [inaudible] I am the middle child. My aunts and uncles, siblings, which is my mom Rosa, which got her name from her mom. But she's deceased due to a car accident. And let's see the only other thing that growing up in this area, it was a very at that time, it was a very booming area. It had a lot of children in the neighborhood. Everybody knew each other. We had a lot of sleepovers. And we had a lot of playing outside with different children in the neighborhood. We had a lot of freedom. We didn't have to worry about locking our doors. We didn't have to worry about your parents worrying about where you were. Because everybody's [inaudible]. So if you get in trouble, everybody knew my mother or father or my grandparents they knew about before we could get home. And they didn't have phones. Not until about the late 70s. Most of the time, I don't know how they got the news. But they got it.

Rachel
Kamis

Your uncle was saying that too.

it was everybody's close family knit up here. And I'm learning a lot about my family history. [inaudible] I got a lot of different surnames. I was just telling William not too long ago that his grandmother which I

06:32

have always known her to be Aunt Millie but her actual name is Louise. I never knew that until I started doing some research. The last few months I've been going into family history to find out more information and names have changed quite much as it was anywhere from like our name now is Keyes K,E,Y,E,S. My great great great grandfather was Ken and his son was K,E,Y,S. And then my grandfather's K,E,Y,S then the children, their name changed to K,E,Y,E,S and then on my grandmother's side which was Bastin that change from Bastin, B,A,S,T,I,N to Baston (B,A,S,T,O,N) and now is Boston (B,O,S,T,O,N) so the census has a lot of history. Some of it I'm still skeptical about because from what I was told compared to what is on it actually census is a big gap.

Tell me. Tell me a little more about that.

It all depends upon like the year range, like some of it was 1812 to 1902. That's where the K,E,N came in. And then from 1902 to maybe 1914 was K,E,Y,S. And then from 1914 to 1940. That's when it turned to K,E,Y,E,S. And that's been the case ever since. Same thing with the Boston because it changed a lot but you don't see Bastin anywhere in the history unless you go back to the census. So this is pretty interesting.

What inspired you to look more into your genealogy?

**Rachel
Kamis**

I'm learning the Indian side is so many different tribes. But when you go to look at the census, it doesn't show you the type of tribe. It shows you the word mulatto. M,U,L,A,T,T, O. So I mean, I wanted to know more about mulatto. And then I started looking at my grandparents. When they were back in that time, they were doing drafting for their service. So that's where I learned the different surnames from and then they have their ethnic groups. And when I look at the ethnic groups they're showing Native American but on the Census it has mulatto for you don't know which Indian tribe it is.

Okay

**Rachel
Kamis**

	<p>Alicia Keyes</p> <p>Rachel Kamis</p>	<p>Can you get William to roll my window up?</p> <p>William, William</p> <p>[inaudible] <i>*Alicia asks William to close her car window due to rain</i></p> <p><i>** Interview resumes</i></p>
<p>09:21</p>	<p>Rachel Kamis</p>	<p>Yeah. Okay, so we started to talk about well, I'd love to hear more about. Are you ok on that side? I don't want you to get wet.</p> <p>Okay, well, at any point, if you want to move or push back a little bit, so you're not getting what please do not feel free to tell me. Yeah. So I'd love to hear more about your understanding of your family history because it sounds like you've done a lot of this really great work.</p>
	<p>Alicia Keyes</p>	<p>Well, being that I don't really know what tribe I come from because one moment I'm learning that Im Tuscarora. And next moment I'm learning I'm Cherokee. Next one is Lumbee. So I wanted to dig a little further to see, actually, who I am. So that's how I found out about my grandparents and their names and where they come from. And most of my people come from the [??] area. And they migrated from the Roanoke and mainly my grandfather from my understanding came from Roanoke area. And my grandmother came from the [??]</p> <p>And I just wanted to learn a little bit more about just what I am because I don't put down what ethnic group I am, because I have so many different ethnic groups that I can put down. So I just put down other.</p>
	<p>Rachel Kamis</p>	<p>It's really admirable that you've taken so much time to dig into that and to learn more about yourself.</p>
	<p>Alicia Keyes</p>	<p>You just want to know where you come from. Who your people are? And how far back you can go. To find, information.</p>

12:54	Rachel Kamis	<p>I totally understand that. My, my grandma has a big record of least her side the family and I've been meaning to record it. And I really need to do it. Because yeah, don't want to lose that.</p>
	Alicia Keyes	<p>Yeah, I want my children to know where they come from me and my grandchildren to know where they come from. And I'm trying to keep a log so they will have something to look back through to see, where I came from it and my parents came from. Great, great. And I bet that was the most important thing for me because I have two grandchildren.</p>
		<p>And I have one great grandchild. I really want them to know our history. And that's the only way you can do it is to research it and write it down and record it. And I want them to have something to look back on to know who they are other than what people tell them who they are. Yeah, that's the most important thing for me. To let them find out who they actually are. And not be labeled is who you think you are. Yeah, that's the most important thing</p>
	Rachel Kamis	<p>That's really beautiful. Thank you for sharing that. You look a little cold I could, I have a rain jacket if you want to.</p>
	Alicia Keyes	<p>I'm always like this. This is normal for me.</p>
	Rachel Kamis	<p>Okay, I just want to check in and make sure you're good. I feel bad that you're getting rained on.</p>
	Alicia Keyes	<p>I'm good This is normal for me.</p>
	Rachel Kamis	<p>Okay. Yeah, I yeah, I think that's really like I said, it's admirable and amazing how you're, you're doing this work for yourself, but also for your family. And I'd love to hear more about your family. And if there's anyone who was particularly impactful in your life growing up.</p> <p>I admire both of my grandparents, they raised me. Instilled my morals [going to] church on up to [I became an] adult. And like I said, we're a close knit family, especially with my my aunts and uncles who my mother passed away. I was 17 years old. So they had to take up the</p>

Alicia
Keyes

reigns to take care of me until I decided to move forward. believe it or not, there's still taking care of me and I'm 54 years old. They treat me like I'm a little child, but I guess due to circumstances that I have. Oh, [inaudible] I love the stories that they used to tell us when we were young. They used to tell us on Sunday afternoons after we finished playing softball, ghost stories about there's a little house like in the area where we live is still back into the [inaudible] field. And they used to give us the ghost stories about someone there in there had died. And then occasionally you can see this little light shining, coming down [inaudible] she was talking about our grandparents. Great great Yeah.

Is Chanel, your cousin?

**Rachel
Kamis**

Everybody here is double cousin. Seriously, we're double cousins. Because everybody from what I understood when I was growing up, this was a close knit family areas. So they wouldn't allow other people to come into the community. And it was just like, keeping everybody else, they keep everybody away from the world, it's just that they were just didn't allow outsiders to come in because they didn't to create any issues between the families. So what they did is they used to ran people out that were not from the community, they would chase them out how just like, run them off with a gun, or just run them out. If they didn't belong here, just because they didn't want different outside people to come in. That was the story. Whether it was some say it's true, some say it's not, but I do know that most of the people up here, are double kin.

Alicia
Keyes

I don't want to call it incest, but truth that half of the people in this area [inaudible]. And there, that's really what got me interested in wanting to know who my people were, because everybody here is double kin. And it's just a fact, this is just something that we have to live with. And I'm not just talking about one side of a family. I'm talking about both sides of the family, everybody's double kin , no matter how you look at it. So I'm trying to keep my family, my children from running into their relatives, because actually, that's something that happened to me. And that was another reason why I decided, hey, you need to start going back and doing some research because you don't know who your relatives are. You need to start digging to see what's going on. Because I ran into an incident where I didn't know I had a half brother. And I was liking my half brother. And I didn't know he was my half brother, until later

on. So I was like no this is gotta stop. So periodically, I would start looking and then I got sidetracked. And I just stopped until recently when I had my great grandchild That's really when I wanted to dig into knowing more about my family because my grandson's grandmother is related to me. So I'm trying to figure out how far down the line we're kin. And that's the reason why I'm digging a lot more to see. Because, like I said, everybody here is double kin. And when you have children, you want to know if they're going to be healthy. You know, you need to know what the background is. A lot of times, if they get sick, you don't know what's going on. And it's a lot of neurological disorders pertaining to our family. It runs deep in our family we have multiple sclerosis. I had small fiber neuropathy, peripheral neuropathy. And you have vasculitis, you have heart disease, diabetes, and it runs very strong throughout this community. And you get different things that you want to try to avoid. And I don't want my grandchildren to have to suffer because of something that happened in the family history a long time ago. I want to be on top of it. So if anything does happen, at least I know what to somewhat look for is just in case something He does have some issues but they are related to family history, like I said I want to know more about my son's family because his grandmother is on my side and we're related I found that out about six months ago

I was telling my son, he was like “no, no mom, we can't be related.” I was like, somewhere down the road, we're all related like you you don't know, what you're gonna run into that actually, that is the reason why I left the area. Because once I found out that I had a half brother, and I didn't know that he was my half brother that I was liking, I had to leave. It was strange, it was weird.

20:45

**Rachel
Kamis**

Makes sense.

Alicia
Keyes

So I don't want my grandchildren to go through the same deal. And that's very important to me to be sure that I keep the family as separated as possible.

Birth defects are something to have to deal with you when I started researching, trying to find out what happened to different people in your family, especially with neurological disorders, they are very serious. So you have to make sure that you keep on top of that because my sister had multiple sclerosis, my father had multiple sclerosis I just got lucky and I got small fiber peripheral neuropathy, which is damaging nerve condition and is still hereditary. And that's something you don't want to pass down to the next person in the family.

Complications arise and you don't understand where they come from, and then you start doing research. Okay, so and so had this issue, and I wonder, does it have anything to do with what's wrong with me? Your background is very important to research to learn the medical side, especially, although you're picking up other things along the way. The most important thing to me is the medical side, knowing what I can do to help my family to keep them from having to go through what I went through, because I've been through a lot of things. From a little girl, I was premature. I don't know if it's because I was a distant relative or if it's just something that I had, because what I had is rare. But it's still part of the multiple sclerosis, muscular dystrophy, all that nerve disease is right in the same category. Or I can see sometimes something in my own children that I passed to them. And I'm trying to say, "You need to go get that checked out because you don't know. It could be something that you got from me." So I want them to make sure that they're okay, and I don't want to keep passing it down to the next person that's being born. Doing research, trying to figure out where you come from, who your people are, is the best thing that anybody can do for themselves. And the main thing is to learn who you are and where you come from because it can affect your life positively or negatively.

Rachel
Kamis

It's important to understand holistically it sounds exactly right. If you don't mind, can you repeat what you said about the stories that your grandparents would tell you because I think that's around when the camera cut off.

24:03

Alicia
Keyes

Sunday mornings we would come to church, this very church I've been in his church since I was nine years old. And after church we would softball till about dusk, and my aunts and uncles would sit on a porch and tell us ghost stories. They say they were true stories. And like I said there was a wooden house is not too far away from my grandmother's

home in the field, way back. You can see it from the road. And they said some people had got killed out there in that home and occasionally if you look, you can see this ball of light, and a ball of light would light the house on the inside. And when it lights the house on the inside, you can see it gradually coming out of the house to the field. Until You get to if you're walking and you get to a certain distance, if you get too close to it just automatically disappear. And then there's another ghost story where my own grandfather passed away. And we had moved into a new home probably about six months after he was in the home, he had passed away and at night, coming out the hallway we could hear it [steps] all the way to the bathroom. And when it gets to the bathroom, split second. The toilet would flush. And it would do that

Maybe say maybe twice a month, and you could hear it and I was like, oh, that's just grandad. That was his routine. And he would go to the bathroom late in the night. And it was interesting. And we thought it was our imagination. But it was actually it's actually a spirit. Believe it or not, up here. We do believe in spirits. They do exist. And people say they don't exist. I have seen many weird things happen. When I was living up here at my grandparents home, you could see without even knowing, you could see pennies laying everywhere on the floor, in the yard. They would just be in little clusters. Nobody know where they come from. But that's where we find them laying around everywhere. We were trying to relate who could that be. We had an uncle. His name was uncle George. He used to give us change. So we related those pennies to Uncle George, that was letting us know that he's around. And that's how we ended up saying "Uncle George came through today. We saw pennies everywhere today." And things like that it was it was fun growing up. Like I say everybody's close knit related. We never had any. It's a quiet neighborhood. We've never had any violence up here that I know of.

Sleepovers. It didn't matter if you were at a person's home and it was late all you had to do was let the parent know that you're not coming home. And then make sure that you make sure you ask the person of the home that you're at that it's ok to stay. Next morning you're parents would come pick you up. We didn't have that problem. We would walk home. One end of the road. We're talking about 3,4 miles. We would walk from one end of the road Sunday afternoon to right up here to this

little country store. I don't know if you've seen it before you got to the church. But its a country store that William's uncle Richard, was in charge of before he passed away. He built that store. We would go to that store every Sunday. and play games. Shoot pool, play tag, it was a family store. It was a family store. We didn't have to worry about time frames. We didn't have to worry about getting in trouble. Because everyone and everybody knew where you were. And we just had a freedom you don't have that now. You can't play free anymore. And that's what I miss the most. Of being up here growing up. It's being able to be free.

Of course this area is called Free Union because there was no slaves up here. It was nice to be able to run around. And be on the farm We had fun on the farm. We always did our chores, we never got any major trouble. But as long as we done what we were supposed to, we could do just about anything we wanted to. We didn't have to worry about our family being worried about where we are and what we doing. And none of that stuff It's been fun growing up, and there's no place like home. Yeah, there's definitely no place like home I've been to many other places. But I've always come back home

Because this is the place to be, I got a lot of childhood memories up here. Over at that church where that burgundy car is parked, there used to be a big, huge tree. We had a swing in it. It wasn't a daycare, but we stayed at the church a lot. But that is where most of the kids played at. We played at church outside on the swings or whatever was there to play with, and they didn't have to worry about us because they knew we were okay and we were safe. Especially at church, they didn't have to worry about us. Easter egg hunts, we had a lot of arts and crafts that we had done, and played softball coming up. And we did it, it was done. What kids do: hopscotch. What is it? Jumping jacks. Nobody knows what jumping jacks is now. And then you have the little operation game. We used to play all that right in the church annex. We had all that stuff. It was fun. It was fun to come to church because we knew we had a lot of stuff to do, a lot of great memories.

**Rachel
Kamis**

It sounds like it was a good time.

32:14

Alicia Keyes

Didn't have to worry about being scared because everything was at peace and at home and you surrounded by family anyways so.

It's just too bad that the young kids today don't have that kind of stuff to grow up with. They don't know anything about priming tobacco. My job was to get in the [inaudible] and pack tobacco with my feet. Because i was a little girl so that's what my job was even though I was small somebody has to do it so I was the person who would get in there and walk around and pack the tobacco down. By the time, I was I would say, by the time I was 13 I knew how to loop tobacco and even though it was a chore. We used those chores as play time. Because that was the thing for us to do. Anything that was a chore we turned it into playtime.

Rachel Kamis

Yeah. make it fun

Alicia Keyes

From picking strawberries, picking cucumbers, to staffing beans, to learning how to preserve foods in jars. That was my favorite thing with my grandmother. She loved to preserve foods in jars. And I'm glad that she taught me to do it because food is high now. So I get to preserve foods now and put them into jars and save them for the winter or the summer whichever rolls around. You can't find too many people these days unless it's an older generation that know how to that kind of stuff. A lot of the that stuff is gone now cause everybody is so busy. And there is technology. And they don't take the time to learn how to do I won't call it a necessity. But it can turn into a necessity with the way that food prices are going right now. But it's a therapy type thing because it's something you can enjoy actually enjoy doing and to share it with the next person would be the best thing you could do. To teach someone else what you learned when you were growing up. It makes it much more fun to do it with your grandchildren or your children. Everything I learned when I was growing up I passed it on to my sons. And everything they learned they're sharing it with their children. We just

gotta keep the legacy going. I learned it from my grandparents.
[inaudible]

Even though I miss them dearly but I'm glad that they taught me values and morals that keep me coming back. I'm grateful for that even though I miss them. But I'm glad that it turned out like this. Because I still love my family and they love me. And that's what it's all about. The greatest gift is love.

**Rachel
Kamis**

Totally agree

Alicia
Keyes

And I'm sorry.

**Rachel
Kamis**

No no. Don't apologize.

Alicia
Keyes

There is nothing like family love. Coming together and being able to fellowship and tell them you love them. You never know what is going to happen from day to day. So I'm proud of my community and where I come from. That I am. There is no place like home. When you get tired of the business and steadiness of going going going. You can always come back home and just enjoy nature. That's the best thing. Family and nature. But learn everything that you can about your family. Pass it on to the next generation and keep it alive. Because that's your legacy. That's your legacy.

37:14

**Rachel
Kamis**

**I think that's a good point to end on. That was really powerful
Thank you for that. Thank you for being so vulnerable with me. I
appreciate that.**

Alicia
Keyes

This was good. This was very good.

**Rachel
Kamis**

Is there anything else you'd like to share?

Alicia
Keyes

I think that should cover it. I just want to make sure that everybody knows it that it is important to find out where you come from. Because you can't just say you're one ethnic group. Because you're a lot of ethnic groups no matter who you are I don't care where you come from. It's multiple you can't just put down one ethnic group. That not who you are. Don't let no one label you because that is not the case. I call myself a rainbow because I'm a person of many colors.

**Rachel
Kamis**

I like that.

Alicia
Keyes

Im a person of many colors. So don't stick one stigma on me. That's it.

**Rachel
Kamis**

We are all complicated and beautiful right?

Alicia
Keyes

That is exactly right. We are all god's creatures and he created us in his own image regardless of who you are. That's it.

**Rachel
Kamis**

**Thank you Alicia. It was an honor to speak with you. And thank
you for your time.**

Alicia
Keyes

Any time. If I can be of help you know how to reach me.

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