



In collaboration with
Brenda Rease
Piney Woods Elder

Date: March 26, 2023

Interviewer(s): Amanda Ostuni and Lillian Thomas

00:02	Brenda Rease	My name is Brenda Rease: Brenda Joy Smith Rease. Right now, I'm retired but I'm working at a senior center in Jamesville, North Carolina. I'm the site manager.
00:17	Interviewer	What does that entail?
00:20	Brenda Rease	What it entails?
00:21	Interviewer	What's the job?
00:24	Brenda Rease	I'm an assistant Site Manager, I make sure they get food. I have to serve them the food or whatever they want. We do puzzles, we do games. Sometimes we have someone to come in to check the blood pressure. Sometimes we have somebody to come in and talk to us about diabetes. Things like that.
00:45	Interviewer	Why did you decide to do that?
00:47	Brenda Rease	Oh, no first I decided to become a [inaudible]. I became a [inaudible] in September of this year—last year. Except last September, the site manager died, so I had to do it all. I was a [inaudible], the site

		manager up until about the 26th of January. Then they decided to make me site manager.
1:14	Interviewer	Ok, and how are you connected to the Piney Woods Free Union community?
1:21	Brenda Rease	I was born and raised down here. I was born on Creek Road. I've been there for seventy four years.
1:32	Interviewer	Same house?
1:34	Brenda Rease	No, we took the old house down. I just put a trailer down there next to the lake. I've been there for seventy four years. I was raised on the farm, my daddy was a farmer. We raised—my dad raised hogs, my mother raised chickens. And that's what we lived off of, and my mother raised a garden. So we had vegetables, and we had our own meat, and we had our own eggs. And I had to get up every morning and help take tobacco out the barn. Then I used to have to loop tobacco and hand tobacco. I also worked for other people —handing tobacco and looping tobacco—other farms. On the day that my daddy took in his tobacco I had to stay there and help him. I had to work in the field. Chop peanuts, shuck corn. Shuck the tobacco, top tobacco. I did it all—it was ten of us, but the last one died. It was seven boys and two girls. However, when my sister was about five, she went and stayed with my grandmother because she only had one daughter and she moved to the city. So I was there with all them boys. So it was hard on me to do it all just about some of my brothers helped out. We didn't have no washing machine, my mama washed clothes on the washing board. We had a pump, we had to dump the water on the clothes. We had a line. We got a washing machine wringer, had a wringer on it—you know, you put the clothes through, you run it through the wringer. Still had to rinse the clothes out. My mother didn't ever get no washing machine but we took the clothes to the laundromat. But finally after she died, I moved in my trailer, I got a washing machine. That's what my sister gave for my house warming. We had just a small house I don't know how we did, but about four of us slept in a bed. But we didn't go hungry, sure didn't. My mama'd cook the pot of beans and that fat back meat and that was good. She used to cook two pails of lard biscuits. I will tell ya they were good

		too. I ate about seven. They would come out so big. It wasn't hard but some time we had to pick cucumbers—my dad made cucumber soup. We had to get up early in the morning and pick cucumbers.
04:33	Interviewer	How did you feel about doing that work when you were a child?
04:39	Brenda Rease	Guess what? When I got older, I was about 19 or 20 I said when I leave here I don't want to work in no more tobacco. I said I want to work in a factory. That's what I did. My first job was at shoe factory, I learned how to make shoes. I sewed the back of the shoe up. Then I left there and I went to [inaudible] then it turned into [inaudible] and I was a operator operating 20 machines I had to walk and make sure no heads was out and if it I was I had to put them in. And then I stayed there for about ten years as an operator, then and I became a threader, I had to thread the machines up. I had to climb up there and blow the [inaudible] back and then lay these, lay 3 of these and then pull it down and take the the ball out and thread it and then had to get somebody else to put the ball in. That was my last job— the plant closed down in 2009—I left there and went to the group home and that's where I retired. I worked there for almost nine years. I fell, I hurt my shoulder, I hurt my hip, so they let me go in January before I had a surgery. But guess what? I sued.
06:28	Interviewer	What was that decision?
06:30	Brenda Rease	Because they said I had used up all my sick time or something. But that wasn't right because I hadn't had my surgery and it wasn't paying in my worker's compensation on time.
06:43	Interviewer	How'd that go? Did you win?
06:44	Brenda Rease	I sure did.
06:49	Interviewer	What was the outcome of that? What did you get?

06:54	Brenda Rease	I got almost \$50,000. I got more than that but the lawyers got theirs and also they set aside \$3500 for my shoulder so if anything happened to it I could use that money for it. I have it in the bank. I can't touch it.
07:24	Interviewer	How did you move on from that? Were you able to get what you needed?
07:29	Brenda Rease	Yes. You know what to do with that money? I paid off my car, put a top on my house, on my trailer, I cleaned up my trailer. I had a porch with some side rails—that's what I did with my money, try and spend it all.
07:52	Interviewer	Tell me a little bit about your relationship with Piney Woods Free Union overall. What do you know about the history of the community and your family history?
08:04	Brenda Rease	Well my mother was born as a Boston but she married a Smith. We all we are all related in Piney Woods. The James', the Pierces', the Whitehursts'. We're all related up here.
08:27	Interviewer	So did you hear a lot about growing up, did you hear about your family background and the community's background? Like how much of the origins of the community did you talk about growing up?
08:45	Brenda Rease	No, my mother's mother died when she was about five years old because she didn't hardly know her mama. My mother's mother was a James and they had a flood one time, I don't know much about it. My daddy used to have a community cart, so that's how how he travels, how he got around. And finally one day he got a tractor and he had a cart so that's how he got around then. He had a community store right in the middle of the road. He could walk for anything that he wanted, so we didn't have to go to town for it. But for the doctors we had to go to Plymouth, they didn't come to the house.
09:52	Interviewer	What were some of your favorite parts about growing up in this community?

09:58	Brenda Rease	Well me and my friends is walking the road. You know we could walk around, walk down the road, didn't have to worry about nothing. You know the road was a dirt road. Me and my friends, we would walk the road, they would walk me home, and sometimes we would walk the other ones home. We would end up by ourselves. And we used to play basketball on my street down that road. So that's what I liked about it was being with those friends and walking down the road you didn't have to worry about nobody grabbing you or nothing. But now, oh yeah. And you know you could sleep with the door open and the windows down, but you'd better not do that now.
10:43	Interviewer	Why are things different now?
10:46	Brenda Rease	I'm afraid somebody might come and try to rob you or something.
10:52	Interviewer	Because there's more than your community members in the area?
10:56	Brenda Rease	Yes it is. But now we have different people in the neighborhood moving in here now
11:03	Interviewer	Why is that happening? Have people left and now there's vacancies or is it just growing?
11:09	Brenda Rease	Some people are selling their land.
11:15	Interviewer	Why are people selling?
11:16	Brenda Rease	I don't know, but I heard somebody say that "I might as well sell it because my children will sell it when I'm dead and gone." But we always say we're gonna try to keep our land that my dad and mama worked so hard to try to keep and not sell it.
11:39	Interviewer	So are there are a lot of generational differences between community members in terms of what they want out of the community?

11:45	Brenda Rease	Yes, but most people in the neighborhood they want they want to keep their land. You have to work try to keep other people out. They want to try to keep it and not sell it. In community that's the road that I stay on? And I hear other folks, my aunt had a house, her husband died, they came moved back to the city, had a great big house, and he died so she went to New York and stayed with her daughter. But now they have sold that house. But she didn't sell the land that her mama grew up on and they didn't sell that land, but she sold the land that her and her husband bought.
12:32	Interviewer	So as this is all happening, what are you thinking about what you want—if new people move in who aren't part of the community—What do you want them to know about the legacy of Piney Woods Free Union and how they should they should
12:46	Brenda Rease	They shouldn't. they shouldn't sell the land, they should keep it. That's what I think. They shouldn't sell their land, they should keep it. but most people moving in, some of them bought the house, and some are written but most people—let me see one, two—but most people have sold the house and the land. Three people have sold their land. And different races are moving in. It used to be all Black, but now different people of different races are moving in.
13:27	Interviewer	So what does that mean to you in terms of the legacy of the community? How will that change? What what will you lose?
13:34	Brenda Rease	Nothing I can do about it but I hope that they are nice people. I hope they are nice, that's what I'm hoping.
13:47	Interviewer	Is there anything else that you want to add about your life, your experience in the community or the Piney Woods Free Union?
13:57	Brenda Rease	I never moved away in I don't intend to. I go to the city to visit my daughter, but I come back. I used to visit my aunt, but she moved down here but now is back in New York. I haven't been up there in about 10 years. I haven't been to see my daughter.

14:17	Interviewer	So your family is here and New York? Where else?
14:20	Brenda Rease	I have a daughter and a son. My daughter is in New York and my son is in Jamesville, North Carolina, not too far from here. And I have five grandchildren. Three in New York and two in North Carolina.
14:37	Interviewer	How often do they come here?
14:41	Brenda Rease	Not often. Not often. I don't see my grandchildren in New York unless I go up there. My granddaughter told me one day this month, she said me and mama ought to ride down there, I told mama I've got to come see you. I said "yeah, that would be nice, come on." If I come up for their birthday, I'ma look, I'ma see.
15:07	Interviewer	What's the biggest obstacle for them to get down here?
15:12	Brenda Rease	Well, they only have cars. But you know, they've got these maps, GPS, they can find the way now. But me going up there? No. If I go, I will fly. That's why I usually go and fly. I don't drive up there, no.
15:34	Interviewer	So what will you do with them the next time they come down if they do get here soon?
15:39	Brenda Rease	Well, I think I would take them out for dinner. I'm not going to cook, I would take them out to dinner. They love to go out and eat anyway.
15:48	Interviewer	Within the community is there a place that you would go?
15:51	Brenda Rease	No, I'll have to go to Plymouth or to Williamston. To Greenville. There's no place in town to go and eat. I have to cook myself.
16:01	Interviewer	Okay. Yeah, anything else you want to share? Do you have other people that are important to you here that make it home?

16:12	Brenda Rease	Yes, my sister-in-laws and I have three brothers still here in Piney Woods. I have four brothers that died. I had two that died back to back. One in February and one in March. In 2016.
16:36	Interviewer	How do you honor their memory here?
16:39	Brenda Rease	Well I miss them, I know that I miss them. I wish they were here. I miss my baby brother. I think a lot of people miss him in the neighborhood.
17:00	Interviewer	Anything else that you'd want to share? We didn't get to about?
17:04	Brenda Rease	No. That's it. I love coming to church.
17:11	Interviewer	It's part of what makes this home?
17:12	Brenda Rease	Yes. I've always come to this church since I was born, and I'm not leaving. I don't care if the pastor leaves, I'm not going.
17:27	Interviewer	Thank you so much. I really don't want to take up more of your time, but we really appreciate it. And I don't know if you know how you can access it later but we'll have it available on our website and then for your own records when it's completed. Yeah, I mean it is kind of a nice little accessory.
17:58	Brenda Rease	I forgot I forgot that we had a wood heater
18:01	Interviewer	A wood heater?
18:05	Brenda Rease	That's right. We grew up on wood.
18:13	Interviewer	You've really seen all the technology.

18:14	Brenda Rease	Sure have. And then finally we got an oil heater. Yeah, we had a wood heater. Yeah, my brothers had to go outside and chop wood and I had to help bring it in.
18:32	Interviewer	So were you really strong?
18:36	Brenda Rease	Yeah, I'd be out there trying to bust the wood. I miss my brothers. But finally, I got a trailer where I had electric heat, all over the whole house. It doesn't matter with a wood heater. You know, it didn't heat the whole house up.
18:59	Interviewer	So you've been here through all the changes.
19:01	Brenda Rease	I sure have.
19:03	Interviewer	What's next, flying cars in the community?
19:05	Brenda Rease	I guess so. And you know, my grandmother used to make those blankets and quilts and we had to wrap up at night with two. Two or three quilts at night. I forgot all about that. Yeah, we grew up with a wood heater. You know, some people still burn wood, but I'm not. I said, I don't want to never burn no more wood.
19:38	Interviewer	I don't think I could do that. I got a bad shoulder.
19:42	Brenda Rease	I can't do it. But some people still burn the wood heater. They have central heat, but they still burn a wood heater. Like my brother. He has central heat. He still likes his wood heater. He got a fireplace to go burn heat in there. You know that wood heat was good, it felt good.
20:07	Interviewer	Good thing it doesn't get too cold in the winter here anymore.
20:11	Brenda Rease	No it don't. Sure don't. But that's it. I forgot to tell y'all that. You can't think of everything right at the moment.

20:28	Interviewer	I mean I'm glad you added it. It's very interesting We got it I was able to get it.
20:34	Brenda Rease	That wood heat was a good heat.
20:36	Interviewer	Do you need a hand up?
20:37	Brenda Rease	No, I can get up.
20:42	Interviewer	I love your hat by the way.