

Heirloom Gardens Oral History Project
Interview with Shannon Rodgers by Charlotte Defriez
Conducted on June 29th, 2024 in Farmville, NC

[00:00:00] **Charlotte Defriez:** This is Charlotte Defriez with the Heirloom Gardens Oral History Project. It's June 29th, 2024 and we are at the Farmville Public Library. So, please could you introduce yourself, and tell me some things about yourself that you feel are important.

[00:00:16] **Shannon Rodgers:** Okay, um, my name is Shannon Rogers, um, things about me that are important.

I'm 30 years old, I grew up in Farmville, and I've lived in the Farmville, Greenville area all my life, with the exception of when I went to college. Um, I've been into history since I was in about the third grade, and, I don't know what sparked my desire to learn about my family history. I really, I really don't know what it was, but something, I think maybe it was my girlfriend going into the attic and finding a bunch of pictures that probably did it.

Um, I think that was kind of what sparked me wanting to learn about my family history. And so I've been kind of on that project of my own for about a year now and got involved with this. And so I'm excited to share what I found.

[00:01:01] **Charlotte Defriez:** Thank you. You shared that you are very interested in your family history and that your family is very, um, connected with the Farmville community, and I'm really wondering, this is quite an open-ended question, but could you tell me more about that in your family's, um, link to Farmville?

[00:01:16] **Shannon Rodgers:** Yes. So, um, my family was probably one of the first black families to establish here in Farmville in the 18 hundreds. Um, some of them got their freedom by, uh, fighting in the civil war, which granted them their freedom. Uh, and then some of them were freed. We have connections to the first, first family of the United States. Um, so, you know, they got freed a little bit early and they were able to come here and get land very early and kind of establish themselves in the town, um, and start businesses a little early on.

So it had a little bit of a headstart there.

[00:01:58] **Charlotte Defriez:** And your family's stayed in Farmville ever since?

[00:02:01] **Shannon Rodgers:** Yes, very much, very much established in Farmville. Um, they were really proud of, I think they were really proud of like, the community that they Bowielt here because they were involved with establishments of schools of businesses, um, stores. They had a lot of friends. My great grandmother's best friend was the mayor's wife. She was her best friend, um, and named my grandmother after her. So yeah, we were, we're very, very established here.

[00:02:32] **Charlotte Defriez:** Could you tell me more about the school you mentioned and the shops you mentioned that your family were connected with?

[00:02:38] **Shannon Rodgers:** Yeah. So, um, they were involved with the, so before HB Suggs and San Bundy, which is the main, the main elementary schools in Farmville now, there was an all black school right off of a highway called 264 and it was, you know, of course the highway was Bowielt through it, which destroyed that school, but that was established by the black folks so that they could have, somewhere to be educated.

And then once that happened, Mr. Sam Bundy, and Mr. HB Suggs, they came together with some other black town folk to make the school and, and Bowield that. And my grandmother, her name and her family's name was in the program book for that. And her business, um, Vine's Beauty Salon, where your hair is her business is what she said, was in that book in the back, um, as one of the sponsors and one of the people who was involved with that.

She owned, um, a Bowielding off of Main Street. It's a little white Bowielding. Brick Bowielding that I think is like a church now or something. I'm not really sure but that was, where she first established her business in the 40s, I believe and then she moved it into her house She Bowielt, she Bowielt her house and then she had a little section Bowielt onto the back where she had her salon equipment Bowielt into it and she was there and then her Uncle, he had a contracting business and they have a couple of, um, names like there's Vine Street, which is named after him.

And they had a few other businesses that they established. So kind of all around here, if you see these old structures and some of these old houses, some of these are family houses, um, that me, my cousin who did an interview just before me, coincidentally, I had no idea she was going to be here. Um, she's still, she lives beside me and the three houses in a row next to each other, those are all family houses.

[00:04:24] **Charlotte Defriez:** Yeah, so we still have those. Thank you. Um, and I was wondering, with your family history, what were the things that your family did, so professionally or non professionally?

[00:04:33] **Shannon Rodgers:** Yeah, so, um, my great grandfather and great great grandfather was, one of them was a blacksmith, a few of them were farm laborers, midwives. A lot of just, you know, the typical, careers that I think you hear associated with Black folks, especially Black people in the South.

And then, you know, as the generations went on, you started getting business owners because they, kind of were able to accrue that little bit of money and kind of, put down those roots, they were able to give their kids a little bit of a foundation. And then that's when you start getting the business owners, the store owners, my grandma with her beauty shop. And then her, daughter, my grandma Blowis who is named for the previous mayor of Farmville's wife. She was a teacher for decades in the town. And then, uh, grandma, of course, with her beauty salon.

Yeah, you had people who were farm laborers and, you know, did the, worked with their hands. And then you had the folks who got a little bit more cerebral as time went on, but we kind of kept the, the tradition of working with our hands. Cause, um, even as a kid, I remember my grandma and great grandmother picking me up from school and then going to the orchard or going to the strawberry fields after school and stuff.

So nature has kind of always been a big part of my childhood and being, like, just having my hands in dirt was always a big part of growing up.

[00:05:53] **Charlotte Defriez:** Could you tell me more about your memories going to the orchard or going strawberry picking?

[00:05:56] **Shannon Rodgers:** Yeah, yeah, so we would um, I would get out, so my grandma was a teacher. I would go into her classroom after school where she would do her after school teacher things and then she and my great grandmother my grandma duck, that's what we called her, grandma duck. We would all go to a strawberry field and pick strawberries where they would make fresh strawberry ice cream Um, right there and I remember taking a school trip there.

Um, we would go to the orchard, we would pick apples and we would bring them home and then sometimes we would go to this little, um, this like little seaside port where grandma would get fresh, fresh live crabs which used to

scare me and she'd put them in a cooler full of ice and I'd be like, Isn't that really cold for them? And she's like, no, it just puts them to sleep. And she's like, calms them down. And then she would take me back home and she would boil them. And I was like, doesn't that hurt them? And she'd be like, no, that puts them to sleep. And I'm like, yeah, I guess you're right. And I didn't realize it till earlier. Then what was happening, but I was like seven so I didn't think about it then. but yeah, we would do stuff like that.

And then sometimes we would come home and we'd make cookies and things like that. So yeah

And then behind her house, which was my great grandmother's house first, grandma duck had a flower patch so she grew flowers And I remember her having a chicken coop and the eggs were brown. And then when she passed and the house went to my grandma, Grandma Blowis, she was like, I remember distinctly her with her little bonnet on digging up the flowers and putting down new seeds and being like, your grandma duck, grew flowers. I grow food. And so she was, she started growing her vegetables and stuff back there and we would, eat food made with her, her veggies out of her garden.

[00:07:42] **Charlotte Defriez:** What kind of vegetables did she grow and what kind of things did she cook from them?

[00:07:47] **Shannon Rodgers:** Tomatoes, collards, lettuce, lots of greens, lots of collards, um, lots of cabbage greens. She would make this tomato cucumber salad that I hated growing up but is so good now. And I hate that I didn't eat, I hate that I didn't eat more stuff that she made growing up. Crab cakes with the crabs she would put to sleep. Crab cakes with the crabs and bell peppers. All kinds of, all kinds of stuff. Yeah. And her and grandma duck were really good at using fresh ingredients. They used to, they had a slaughterhouse. They used to slaughter chickens and stuff like that.

Yeah. I wouldn't do that. No. If you were gonna ask that, I would not do that. I could never.

[00:08:30] **Charlotte Defriez:** Uh, did you, did you have a favorite food when you were growing up?

[00:08:32] **Shannon Rodgers:** Oh my god, she made the best fried chicken in the world. Ever. Period. Nobody's fried chicken is ever gonna touch that woman's fried chicken.

Um, but she was a good cook. The only thing she ever made that I didn't like was her spaghetti. I never liked her spaghetti. Everything else, the best.

[00:08:49] **Charlotte Defriez:** Do you know how she made her fried chicken?

[00:08:51] **Shannon Rodgers:** My cousin does and I really want that recipe. I, I think I know now, like I think looking back on it I could figure it out. I think it was in the type of meal that she used to bread the chicken and I think she used buttermilk. Oh and I know for a fact she used Mrs. Dash and um, a seasoning called accent. So I, I might could figure it out. Hehe, on memory.

[00:09:16] **Charlotte Defriez:** um, what are some of your favorite memories associated with like the garden?

[00:09:21] **Shannon Rodgers:** I, I remember one time, I don't even know why this is a favorite memory, my cousin, my older cousin took one of the eggs that she had gotten from the chicken coop. It was raining and I don't know why he ran out there but he ran out there and threw the eggs at a tree nearby and I was like, Why are you doing that?

I don't really I don't know what he said, but he was laughing And he came in and I said I was gonna tell and he's like no I'm gonna tell grandma that it was you and I was like, I'm gonna tell her that it was you. And so we came in and I I don't know if she asked about what happened to the eggs or if he tried to say that I threw the eggs. But I remember saying no Chewy threw the eggs as we call him, we call him Chewy. I said Chewy threw the eggs and she was like i'll spank both of you and I was so mad because I had never had a spanking before and i'm like, I know i'm not about to get my first spanking because of my cousin doing some weird stuff. We didn't get spanked, but I think she was just threatening us.

But, uh, we sat and ate around the TV and I think after we ate, I realized, Oh, okay, I'm good. We're good. I don't know why that's something that I remember as being really funny, but I just, that's something I really love.

[00:10:36] **Charlotte Defriez:** That is a great story. so I know, your cousin mentioned you had like a large family. So I'm, I'm wondering if you could like speak more about, um, kind of the food or any memories or traditions, that happened like within the family or at family gatherings.

[00:10:53] **Shannon Rodgers:** Yeah. So, um, my grandma Blowis has had seven kids, and all of them had grandchildren. I'm the youngest of the first set. It's a whole bunch of us now.

I don't even know all their names. I don't even know how old they all are. But, um, so she. She obviously knew how to cook for large groups of people and a lot of the time she would cook for like every holiday. One of the things I really love that she did is that every single holiday she decorated.

So St. Patrick's Day, the house was green, her classroom was green. Easter, the classroom was in pastels and she would cook an Easter dinner that would bring everybody from the neighborhood. She would cook and like literally anyone that came over got a plate. I ain't know them people. Those weren't my family members. I don't know who them people were, but they would come over and they would get food.

And I think that was my favorite time of the year. And she had this big, pit out in the back. It's still in my cousin Marsha's yard, but we used, she used to roast ham and stuff in that big pit. And for, so for Easter, we would come over to her house first and so would all the rest of the neighborhood and then we'd go to church and then we'd come back and somehow, I don't know how because she left the church at the same time as us, there'd be a whole new meal there by the time we got to her house, and we would all eat and then for Christmas, she would cook a really big breakfast, which we would eat before we would go to church and then we would come back afterwards and again, there's a whole new meal. I don't know when she had the time to do that because she was right there in her hat, like, just right with us, and she would have all this food and we would go and she, oh, she loved Christmas.

The house was beautiful. She would have like little fake snow everywhere. Loved nutcrackers. She would have nutcrackers and trees and lights all over the house. And we would all eat in wherever we could find a place because like I said there was seven of them and there was ike 20 of us. And then we would all go into the living room around this huge tree with all her nutcrackers in there and we would exchange gifts and I remember getting silver dollars and two dollar bills and things like and I just I love that it was, it was so warm, it was so warm and I would love to I love I would love to recreate that. So those are my favorite memories of food having to do with her.

[00:13:10] **Charlotte Defriez:** Does your family still gather around food and maintain that tradition?

[00:13:14] **Shannon Rodgers:** For family reunions, we do. When she died, unfortunately, like what happens with a lot of elders, that kind of fell by the wayside for a long time. And it was really confusing to me because I was young when she died. So that was really confusing and hurtful for me.

But now that I'm older, I'm seeing it. Starting to kind of I think slowly pick the mantle up a little bit and try to reestablish that so it's it's getting there and hopefully my girlfriend and I can start recreating that tradition. So.

[00:13:42] **Charlotte Defriez:** That would be awesome.

[00:13:43] **Shannon Rodgers:** That would be great

[00:13:45] **Charlotte Defriez:** I just want to delve a bit more into some of the things you told me about food and family reunions And I know you mentioned there was like a pit, and they would roast things over it, and I was kind of wondering what like specific food was served, and do you know how it was made? I know you were pretty young, but.

[00:14:03] **Shannon Rodgers:** Yeah, her ham, she would make, like a honey glaze, and she would have like candied pineapples and cherries. She would kind of roast them, I think she might, she might have gathered like, you know, just like, grassy stuff, just bedding to put in the pit so she could start a fire. And then she would just, you know, take the meat, put it over a grate and, you know, flip it and do her magic. I mean, that's amazing. I, that right there is a level of cooking that I am not going to get to, I don't think, in this lifetime. But I know she would do that.

And then for her chick, her sauce for her barbecued chicken or her grilled chicken, it was, um, like a vinegar, base. Vinegar, I think she would use a little bit of like smoky barbecue I don't know if she ever used honey. I use a little bit of honey in mine a little red pepper to cut the acidity and the honey helps cut the acidity too. And then she would brush it on as she flipped it and it would soak that flavor all the way through so good.

[00:15:02] **Charlotte Defriez:** Sounds delicious.

[00:15:03] **Shannon Rodgers:** It was delicious

[00:15:05] **Charlotte Defriez:** Do you still cook?

[00:15:06] **Shannon Rodgers:** Oh, absolutely. Yeah. Some of the things that, like looking, I guess my memory of the taste serves me well because now that I cook, I can think of like, I am like, okay, these are the flavors that I remember. And this is how she cut the acid. She used a little bit of sweetness in there. She got some smokiness in there to make like layers and depth to that flavor. So I just remember some of the stuff that I remember her doing and the way the flavors tasted and growing up loving Food Network. I'm like, Oh, it's a science to this. Oh, that. Okay. That makes sense. Oh, yeah. Okay. Yeah. So I do still cook.

[00:15:44] **Charlotte Defriez:** So that any food recipes that were passed down or is it more just you kind of remember?

Some of them were like my cousin. My cousin remembered the, um, chicken, fried chicken recipe. So I know you brought, um, some documents to share with us. I'm wondering whether you'd like to share more about them?

[00:16:02] **Shannon Rodgers:** Sure. Okay. So we were just talking, um, before about the squash casserole recipe, which I found in the attic. And it's funny because I remember grandma making this, but I hate it squash. So I never ate it. Um, and I was like, Oh, I should, I shouldn't, you know, make this, for my TikTok channel. I have a TikTok channel.

I was like, I should make this for TikTok. And, um, just then your lovely, I'm not sure is this, is she the coordinator or Ms. Tessa? That's how I know her. But she told me, um, she was like, well, did she use winter or summer squash? And I was like, I don't know, actually, that's a great question. Didn't even think about that.

So yeah, I have the squash casserole recipe. Um, my cousin knows how to make her fried chicken almost like verbatim. Um, other things I know I could make the cucumber and tomato salad that she made. Um, let's see what else did I can make some salmon cakes. I can make those salmon cakes. We go toe to toe on that. I would challenge her to that today.

Um, yeah, things I would've loved to have learned from her chicken and pastry. She's the only person I know that puts boiled chopped eggs in her chicken and pastry. It's really good. It adds like a good texture to it. Um, strawberry cream pie, I would've learned, loved to have learned how to make that, but I think I could figure that out.

God, there's so many things, but I'm figuring stuff out on my own. And I think, um, the important thing, I think it comes naturally to me, but also the important thing is just, tasting stuff, tasting ingredients and just kind of doing your own thing with it. So that's that.

And then on the back of this, don't know why, but she started writing out questions for, um, a United States history quiz because she was also a teacher. That has things like, um, what is foreign policy? What is nationalism? What is the American mission? What was the American mission? Stuff that I honestly don't know myself. Um, so there was that. And then also in her house, I was telling Ms. Tessa, um, there is old pencil sharpeners and stuff around that are Bowielt into the wall. The ones that she had to hand crank because she was a teacher. So that just, there's little stuff in the house that's still reminiscent of the history and the things they used to do there.

Um, I have this very old picture from the 1930s. I want to say it was 1935, of, I believe my great aunts. I'm not sure who these children are, but I believe these are my great aunts.

My dad told me he thinks it's my aunt, Aunt Boosie, and somebody else, but we're not sure. But I found these in the attic, and then I have one of my grandma duck, which is, this is exactly how I remember her. She was a very lovely lady to me, but I also know that she had a mean streak, but she was also a very savvy businesswoman who was very good with money. And that was how she was able to, do do, you know her?

Okay, we have a someone here that knows her you knew my grandma duck
Yeah, I knew miss duck. Yeah

She had a beauty salon and um that that's exactly how I haven't hadn't seen her in so long. So when I saw this picture, I wanted to cry it's like god I was like, I haven't seen grandma duck in so long. And then I found one of grandma blowis hadn't seen grandma blowis in a long time, wanted to cry. So these were these were really special and then, when we started looking into my history, I found that my family was in the 1900 census, for Farmville, North Carolina, and then the 1870 census.

And like I said, um, a couple of them, well, one of them came down in the 1800s, with the Vines family. There's some white Vineses and there's some black Vineses. I know that. And a few of them got their freedom by going into the war. A couple of them went into war. So some of them fought in World War I. Some of them fought in World War II. Some of them fought in Vietnam. And

then some of them fought in the Civil War. And that's how they were able to gain their freedom. And, uh, you know, kind of, you know, get a bit of ahead, because just being free was a head start. You know what I'm saying? So, um, some of them were able to do that.

And, uh, we're just, right now I'm trying to kind of connect all the dots and come up with a very cohesive family tree on that side. And it goes so deep because like when we were finding this stuff, he's like, Oh, and this is Mihaley. Mihaley was married to your uncle Charles and she was a midwife.

And I'm like, wait, wait, wait, she's not even, is she a blood relative? I don't know if we should even go this deep. He's like, no, no, no, you need to know this. And so we started going down that rabbit hole of Mihaley and finding out that there are, there are people who, um, weren't even like the first wives or first husbands. Some of them were, um, stepfathers and stepmothers who just took on the name and had children previously and integrated them into the family.

I think that actually was the case for, I think that was the case for my great uncle, if I can find his obituary. Yep. My great uncle, Albert Vines, I believe his wife, one of her kids, or maybe two of her kids, were actually not by him. And he was born in 1980. I'm sorry. He died in 1985 and was born in 1918.

He was, let's see, he served in the U S army in world war II and reached the rank of PFC. He received an honorable discharge on October 23rd, 1945, and worked at the Norfolk Naval Air Station in Norfolk, Virginia. He retired there in February of 1980 and was the former president of the NAACP West Chesapeake Branch in Norfolk, Virginia.

And he was a member of the HB Suggs Charitable Organization, Norfolk Chapter, and then joined the Farmville Chapter later on. Lucille Vines, uh, was his wife. She was from nor, um, Farmville, North Carolina. Her sons were James E. Jefferson, Newark, um, j James E. Jefferson of Newark, New Jersey, and Albert El Vines of Norfolk, Virginia.

So yeah, and we do have a lot of family from that area, from the Norfolk area, all the way up to New Jersey. Um, the Bronx. New York all over the place.

So yeah, like I said just trying to kind of find a coherent like history family tree and put that together and so that's why I have all these things and this isn't even half of what I have.

One of the most interesting things that I found was my grandmother had a patent in her attic for a self watering planter, And we looked into it, we found the guy who kind of came up with the design, uh, we found that the patent was, was actually cleared and all that good stuff.

So this was an invention, uh, that was actually made. But what I can't find the missing piece is why she had the patent, like why she had it. Because as far as I know, this isn't a family member of ours. So I was gonna try to kind of go into figuring out, is he still alive? You know, does he have some family?

You know, whatever happened with the, the grower, like did they ever create it and all that good stuff? I don't know. She was fascinating. She was an interesting lady.

And like I said, my family had some really interesting people in it. So, I just, I want to kind of keep, I want to keep their legacy alive, but I also want to be an interesting person as well.

So, yeah.

[00:23:39] **Charlotte Defriez:** Um, would it be possible for you to read the census out loud because I was, I was really interested.

[00:23:44] **Shannon Rodgers:** Oh, yeah. Absolutely.

Okay. Um, so yeah 1870 United States federal census for Ben Vernes, because like I said their last name was Vernes and then I guess somehow I don't know through accents or whatever the case it became Vines.

In 1870 he was 45. He was born around 1825. His birthplace was North Carolina. Their home in 1870 was in California Pit, North Carolina. He, um, post office was in Falkland, he was a farm laborer, he couldn't read or write. His wife was Mary Vines, and their children were Mary Ver well, I'm sorry, Prissy Vernes, Susan Vernes, Foreman Vernes, Charles Vernes, who is my great great grandfather. James Vernes, Ely Vernes, Mack Diggins, and Ephraim Diggins. And then we have a 1900 one, uh, for Fred Vines, because this was the other ancestor that we could find. And then in this household, we have Charles Vines and Mahaylee Vines. And in their household was Addie Vines, Freeman Vines, Mary Vines, Martin Vines, Charlie Vines, Fred D. Vines, John Vines, Ned Vines, and Vivian Vines. So yeah, very big families. They were very busy people. I don't know how they had time to do, do the stuff they, anyway, yeah.

But that was what I have found so far. And I do have their certificates that show that they were in the, troops, the, the colored troops, during the Civil War. I have those documents. I left them home because I didn't think I was going to need them, but yeah, that's really cool too.

[00:25:23] **Charlotte Defriez:** Well, we really appreciate your sharing these documents with us.

[00:25:27] **Shannon Rodgers:** No problem.

[00:25:28] **Charlotte Defriez:** Historical and important.

[00:25:29] **Shannon Rodgers:** Yeah, absolutely.

[00:25:30] **Charlotte Defriez:** Thank you. And I think, um, of course, if anything else comes up, just, you know, feel free to, you know,

[00:25:36] **Shannon Rodgers:** There is one thing. So, in the 1970s, Farmville put on like a, she was in the centennial in the 1970s. My Grandma Duck was, um, I guess it was just to celebrate like the establishment. Do you remember this?

[00:25:51] **A.C. Salaam:** Um, 'cause we just had the CES centennial in 2022.

[00:25:55] **Shannon Rodgers:** Uhhuh .

[00:25:55] **A.C. Salaam:** So, uh, the centennial was in 1972. For the incorporation of farm bill.

[00:26:01] **Shannon Rodgers:** Okay. So yeah, she was a part of that. I remember her picture. There's a book in the little kind of research and history section in there and grandma duck's pictures in there. She's with um, some other ladies wearing like, old fashioned garb and a bonnet. Because she was a part of that and then I remember I was about eight and my grandma Blois was going through her closet for some reason and I remember hearing her like squeal in delight. And we were scared because we thought something was wrong.

So we all come running out and she's like, oh my god. It's mama's bonnet and it's this like little red polka dotted bonnet that she's holding because she was just so excited she's like this is her bonnet that she wore for the thing and um, so she was just Super just gushing over that and I didn't get it then but like I said now looking back on it Yeah, I realized how special that was and that was one of the

last moments one of the last things I remember about my grandmother before she passed because not too long after that she passed. But yeah, so I wish I could find maybe I can find that bonnet somewhere I'm gonna try to look for it, if I can find it. It might be up in one of those boxes up there. But, um, that was a, that's a core memory. It was about eight or nine when that happened, so yeah.

[00:27:17] **Charlotte Defriez:** Thank you.

[00:27:18] **Shannon Rodgers:** Yeah.

[00:27:19] **Charlotte Defriez:** Um, I think now I'm, I'm gonna turn back to some more general questions.

[00:27:24] **Shannon Rodgers:** Sure.

[00:27:25] **Charlotte Defriez:** If that's okay with you. Um, and I know we had mentioned talking about, um, medicinal uses of plants and I was wondering This is quite a general question. Do you have any memories of your grandparents, um, or your parents, or any of your family members, using plants medicinally, or, and, also, do you, yourself, use plants medicinally?

[00:27:46] **Shannon Rodgers:** I do, um, now I don't know if, cause I don't really particularly remember, like, them using anything for medicinal purposes, but I started doing it, I started using lavender as natural, like, home remedies for cleaning, for keeping bugs away, chamomile for sleep, which is basic stuff, orange pills to invigorate you and to wake you up, mimosa flowers, which are supposed to be a natural antidepressant, you can brew those into a drink, and so I use that, I use honey for my throat, you can drink it just straight, using things like honey and vinegar as like kind of a toddy, for when you get sick, but I don't remember anything like, like what my grandparents might have done.

My grandmother's might, I'm sure she, I'm sure they did. I'm sure they did. But that kind of stuff was kind of lost because I think by the time I came up, it wasn't like, playing around with, with plants in that way is kind of seen as blasphemous. Or, you know, kind of anti christian, even though it's not, it's really just using nature as it's intended, which is to heal us, and to nurture us. So that stuff I've been having to figure out on my own. And first I started doing it for my skin. I would make my own rose oil, jasmine oil. I make like my own hair oils with flowers and different oils that I get. And I'll, um, you know, kind of infuse them into the oil and use that on my skin and my hair And then I started realizing like a lot of this stuff can keep bugs away. A lot of this stuff can just be used to clean your house, to clean your floors. Um, and it's better

smelling and it's better for your house. It's probably better for the environment, um, to be honest, and it's better for your skin.

I'm still kind of figuring out like the different uses of herbs, flowers, and plants. That's something I kind of really wish that we had kept in the family. But I'm, I'm going to figure it out. That's part of my little project, is I'm going to figure that out.

[00:30:00] **Charlotte Defriez:** Can you talk to me about your process of making those infusions?

[00:30:05] **Shannon Rodgers:** So I put, um, like my favorite flowers, I put them in a double, um, a double boiler process with, so my favorite oil is sunflower oil because it's very light and it's kind of odorless. Um, and then I'll take like jasmine, rose, a little bit of chamomile, just a little bit of lavender, cause lavender is very overpowering, and I will boil it, uh, in a double boiler with the rose, the flowers infused in an oil mixture, usually like grapeseed and sunflower, for as long as possible. I let it sit and it always has like when I first like would do it, it smelled like cooking oil that's like something i've been cooking and it wasn't very pleasant. But once I strained it I would kind of let it sit in a dark place for a while. You'll take it out and it's like oh, oh this it has like a nice little sweet smell, smell to it. And then you can always use like essential oils to kind of give it a different scent.

Like there was something that I made where I was like, Oh, this smells horrible. So I put Lang Lang in it and uh, other like little scented oils just to kind of give it a little bit of brightness. I think it was Marigolds that I had done. And I was like, this smells horrible. It's supposed to be good for my hair, but it smells horrible. Did that, let it sit for a little while and it has this very bright sunshiny scent to it. Um, It did help my hair. Like, I felt like my hair looked shinier, it was softer, and it kind of helped to hold the moisture in. And then when I started using it, I would use it after I showered. That was my main moisturizer. And my skin was so soft and so glowy and so happy. So, um, yeah, we can really make like our own moisturizers and our own hair products and our own toothpaste if we want to. You just have to be, um, innovative and take a little bit of extra time. And you have to do that research. So, yeah.

[00:31:55] **Charlotte Defriez:** And what was it that inspired you to start doing that?

[00:31:58] **Shannon Rodgers:** I got into spirituality, like really into, learning about, Africa and African spirituality. And I realized that they use a lot of roots

and berries and plants and stuff. And I'm like, oh, I can, I can find this stuff. Like I can go out and get honeysuckle and also you can like get just a little bit just a little droplet of something this little sap off of honeysuckle and it's the sweetest thing ever but then you can take the flower and you can use it and so I was like I can go out and I can find these things my grandma grows this stuff and um I started doing that and I would make my own like bath oils. And it made me, it helped me feel more connected to my roots, more connected to where my people are from. And it just felt very special and it felt very right. So, um, that was kind of what, and as I was doing, I'm like, yeah, this, this feels, this feels like the natural course of things rather than going and buying some dove, you know?

[00:32:57] **Charlotte Defriez:** That's awesome. Thank you. Um, and so I know you mentioned you kind of go out and you fetch your materials for this, um, and I was wondering If you have any more memories associating with foraging or collecting things, um, for that.

[00:33:12] **Shannon Rodgers:** Yes, um, so we would go and we would find honeysuckle. And then, like I said, with the honeysuckle you can get, like, a little bit of sap off of it and it's so sweet. Then you can take honeysuckle and it's, like, the, I love the way that flower smells. It's the most beautiful smelling flower ever. And I've taken that and I've infused that, made that into, um, oils, uh, for myself for my skin. And as like a natural perfume, um, gardenias are really good. They have a very distinct scent and my grandma used to grow gardenia bushes all around her house. This is my grandma on my mother's side, not. My grandmother's from here but she would grow them all around our house so I could go and I could pick them and wash them off and you know infuse those into like a little bit of water and have like gardenia water like a little gardenia oil um for like a natural perfume.

We used to one of my favorite things that me and my grandma Blois would do is we would get pecans they would just fall right off the tree and we would just go and pick the pecans and just she would she kept a, a tiered little like a dish where she always had different nuts and usually was like walnuts pecans and some other kind of nut and we would just crack them and eat them and I cannot eat a pecan that's not fresh out of an out of the actual shell. They're not good.

She would also always keep a candy dish where she would keep like usually seasonal candies. So the holiday kisses and stuff like that, or peppermints and stuff. And yeah, like I said, we would go, we would find berries. I wouldn't eat them because I didn't know what they were for, but I would make like, you

know how you make like a soup as a kid out of just the stuff you find, like a little soup.

So we would do that and then we would go because at my best friend's house when I was a kid, had like all these really beautiful, these big I don't know what they're called, but they're big and they look like almost like snowballs, and they're different colors like blue and pink. We would go and get those, and we called ourselves making perfume.

So we'd take them inside, fill up a water with sink, and a sink, a sink with water, and put all the flowers in there, and try to squeeze out what we thought was the scent. And we couldn't figure out why it didn't smell like anything, or it didn't smell that great. But we thought we were making perfume.

So we would put that on ourselves and yeah, just like I said nature and being in nature has always been a big part of my childhood and I got away from that and I like really want to get back to that, but I, I'm slowly learning so I get my flowers and stuff from like spiritual shops and things like that now. Because I don't want to go out and play with something and you know, not wake up tomorrow.

[00:35:57] **Charlotte Defriez:** Um, I know you mentioned um, your grandmother's flowers as like inspiration for all of this and I was wondering Can you talk more about the flowers she grew or the garden she had and what that was like?

[00:36:09] **Shannon Rodgers:** Yeah, so my grandma Helen, she used to have like the most beautiful flowers. She had, um, a big, a big bush of gardenias. Then right beside her house, I feel like those were, I don't know what they were, but they smell, when they bloom, they smell like fried chicken. Like chicken frying in the grease. It's not a pleasant smell. They smell like grease. But they're very pretty.

And she had like these pink like roses that she would keep around her house. And she started, uh, trying to breed them so, after a while, they were like pink and white, and some of them were spotted, and it was just really cool because she started figuring out that she could make them different colors and make the, you know, the leaves start, the, um, petals start turning different colors and in the spring, her house was just always like white and pinks and pale blues and she would go out and, you know, we would pick the, like I said, the gardenias off and bring them in and the house would smell good. Marigolds. She had

marigold, a marigold, um, no, not marigold. What are those? The big ones, um, that start with the M. They're like big, they have big white petals on them.

I'm not sure what those are called, but they're very beautiful. Um, so she had one of those beside her house. A magnolia tree, yes! That's what it was. She had a big magnolia tree. Yeah, beside her house.

And, I think. Like, I think because, like I said, um, I saw so many flowers growing up, I, I associate, spring is my favorite time of the year. And I think I just associate some of my best memories with spring and with flowers blooming and with playing in any time of my life, even as an adult. Like, it's like, Oh, the flowers are out time to go and grab them and see what I can make to, you know, so I associate my flowers with play and relaxation.

And, um, I think that that's what kind of helped to inspire me to like, I want to get back to this. I want to learn how to do this. Nobody ever taught me. So I had to learn how to garden by myself. And I'm still figuring that out. I want to learn how to cultivate again. Yeah.

[00:38:25] **Charlotte Defriez:** So, do you garden? And if so, what do you garden?

[00:38:28] **Shannon Rodgers:** I just started three months ago. Not even, like two months ago. I put down tomatoes and basil because I read that they help each other. And they are almost ready to be picked, they're starting to get some color. So they're getting ripe And then at the I went to roses and they had like plants for sale. So I was like, oh I want to make I want to grow eggplant and they had an eggplant thing So I got that but I was again very sick. That's why I had laryngitis about a week ago. So I went and I got them put them in the car and slept for two days straight and just left them in the car. So they started dying and wilting. And I was like, Oh no, they're not going to be okay. So I went to my best friend, the internet and found out that she can mix hydrogen peroxide and water. And that was supposed to revive them. And I didn't believe it, but I was like, let's, let's figure it out.

So me and my girlfriend, we felt better. So we were like, okay, we're going to go, we're going to go put these in the ground and we're going to make them better. We splashed them with the hydrogen peroxide about two days in a row.

I come back. and the leaves are like green and they're perky again and my eggplant is starting to grow and now like my eggplant is like like yay big and coming out of the shell after it was dying beforehand and um I had some

tomatillo seeds, i'm like i love tomatillo salsa i'm gonna plant some tomatillo seeds never did that before i've actually never grown anything from seeds except for the basil but that's easy you just sprinkle water and then you know so i'm like all right well Sprinkle water. We'll see what happens. And now those are growing too. So a lot of this is by accident. I don't really know what i'm doing. You put it in the ground you put some water on it and you mostly leave it alone is what i'm what i'm finding. So, yeah right now eggplant tomatillo tomatoes and basil

[00:40:17] **Charlotte Defriez:** Is there anything else you're planning to, or you want to grow in the future?

[00:40:20] **Shannon Rodgers:** Yeah, after we get the, um, eggplants up, I promised my girlfriend I would grow sunflowers because that's our favorite flower. So I said I'm going to figure out how to grow sunflowers, so that's my next project.

[00:40:31] **Charlotte Defriez:** Yeah, and on a, on a similar note, kind of asking what's being passed down, I guess, I'm wondering what you cook now.

[00:40:39] **Shannon Rodgers:** Oh, my favorite thing, my favorite dish to make, and my favorite thing that I make the everybody eats is my Tuscan salmon, so i'm gonna get the tomatoes and i'm gonna get some, some onions that I I saved from the garden and i'm gonna make Tuscan salmon with those like slowly I want to try to take the ingredients that i'm learning how to grow and incorporate them in my favorite things to cook. So my Tuscan salmon, um, my honey garlic glazed pork chops is another thing that I love to make and that is usually a favorite, um, my roasted chicken and potatoes, which is my dad's favorite thing that I make, which I did harvest some potatoes from the garden and I used them and they were sweet. I didn't, I didn't realize that potatoes are like much sweeter than, like I said, like I'm figuring this stuff out fresh. I'm like, Oh, this is how it's supposed to taste. Wow! So yeah, the, uh, potatoes. What else have I made? I'm gonna learn with all, with the stuff I have now. I'm gonna do like the, the TikTok trend where they put the mozzarella and then they put the tomatoes around it and the, I'm gonna do that.

So I'm gonna be making, I don't know what that's called, but I'm gonna do that. I'm gonna make a pizza also. So we're just, we just gonna figure it out. We, we just, you know, we ball. We ball.

[00:41:54] **Charlotte Defriez:** And I know we've kind of talked about, like, your use of, like, plants as medicine, or just as things that can help you, and also

gardening, um, and cooking. And I'm wondering what it is that you want to pass down to future generations.

[00:42:10] **Shannon Rodgers:** Ooh, that's a good question. Um, with what the knowledge, because I think, what I'm doing right now is really just getting back to knowledge that's already here, but it's latent. So I would like to, to impart to like younger generations that you can rely on yourself, um, for a lot of this stuff.

Like, There is no reason we don't have fruit bearing trees that are out planted along the roads, but that was a concerted effort by the government to make sure that people couldn't get free food so that it could be monopolized. That's evil. That's actually horrible. Um, so yeah, you deserve to have free, good, healthy food and you can access it yourself if you try.

You deserve to put good things in your body and on your body and you can actually do that yourself. And I just have to learn how so that I can show them how to do that. That's what I want to kind of pass down to them.

[00:43:04] **Charlotte Defriez:** Well, thank you so much for sharing everything with me. It's been great to learn more about your family history and also what you do medicinally and just generally with herbs. And just before we close, I'm wondering whether you have anything else you would like to add and say to us.

[00:43:21] **Shannon Rodgers:** Um, I would like to say, I think if this is going to be heard by other people from Farmville, I, I hope that other young people who are growing up in this small town don't cut out, like, don't count the history and how interesting this little town can be.

I know it's full of a bunch of old abandoned Bowieldings. There's not much here. I got out too. But, it's important to come back to where we're from and, uh, keep this alive because one of the important things about history, especially black history is not letting our ancestors lives be in vain. And a part of that is telling their stories, remembering their stories, honoring their stories with things that you do and the things that you say.

Because that, that way, none of us ever really die. So, you know, I hope that this reaches to other young people in Farmville and other young people in small towns and encourages anybody to kind of learn their own history and learn the history of that little tiny boring town that you want to get out of so badly. This might make it a little bit, a little bit more worth it to be there.

And also I have a TikTok page. Wait, can I plug? Can I shameless plug? Okay. I have a TikTok channel called Vintage in Color, where I talk about history as it pertains to BIPOC people, particularly queer folks of color in history. So if y'all are interested in that, we'd be talking about the Harlem Renaissance and old Hollywood and these old, these dead celebrities are scandalous y'all.

So yeah, just, you know, if you're interested, you know, follow me, vintage and color. Um, but yeah, that's it.

Thank you.

[00:45:06] **Charlotte Defriez:** That aligns greatly with the goals of the project.

[00:45:10] **Shannon Rodgers:** Thank you. All right.