

Interview with Rose Powhatan (Tauxenent-Pamunkey descent)

1: How are you related to Bernie Boston, and what early memories or later awareness do you have of his work as a Washington photojournalist?

Bernie Boston's father Lewin Roblyn Boston (everyone called him "Dick") was the older brother of my father Theodore Wilson Boston.

Bernie was my first cousin from the paternal side of my family. I always looked up to Bernie as a role model. My father was close to him, and treated him like the son he never had.

Bernie was the favored child who received a World War II souvenir fighter jet made from spent bullet shells from my father when he returned home from the war! Bernie gave it to me before he died.

2. Do you believe Bernie influenced other family members or your generation of artists?

Since Bernie was frequently away from home during his time in the Army and his busy professional life, he had more of an indirect influence on my generation of artists. We all thank him for his service.

3. Can you share insights about Bernie's art collection, such as his interest in James Wells's prints or Native American pottery and flutes?

Bernie Boston was proud of being an American of tri-racial heritage, since he was of Tauxenent Indian (Dogue/Doeg), African and European descent. His eclectic art collection included original works done by ethnically diverse artists and served as a visual testimony to his multicultural heritage.

4. After retirement, Bernie became active in local civic and tribal life. What role did he play in the Tauxenent Tribal Council, and how did this connect to his heritage?

After Bernie retired from his busy traveling photojournalist lifestyle, he focused on working with his extended family on Tauxenent tribal matters. I had been appointed to a state tribal recognition panel that oversaw granting state recognition to the Piscataway-Conoy Tribe of Maryland and knew the process necessary to achieve state recognition.

Although I was an enrolled member of the Pamunkey Tribe of Indians of King William County, Virginia at the time (due to my descent through my mother Georgia Mills) I decided to help my father's fellow Tauxenent tribal descendants achieve their official state recognition as an Indian tribe indigenous to Fairfax County, Virginia.

I approached my “double cousin” Keziah Boston (she was a Mills/Boston, just like me) with plans for how the descendants of the historic Tauxenents of Fairfax County could reclaim their official standing with the government. After meetings to confirm our intentions to go forward with the state recognition process, a Tauxenent Tribal Council was formally established, as well as a working group tasked with helping to do what was necessary to achieve our goal.

Bernie Boston became a member of the Tauxenent Tribal Council. Keziah Boston was elected to be the Chief of the Tauxenent Tribe of Indians. I was the Assistant to the Chief, assigned the task of drafting an official “Intention to File for Virginia Indian State Recognition” document to the Virginia Council On Indians. Unfortunately, our timing was off. The Virginia Council On Indians was disbanded. Tauxenent Chief Keziah Boston died on May 13, 2023. She is survived by her 91 descendants and thousands of cousins.

5. Did Bernie photograph Virginia powwows or Native community events?

I had photographs of myself, cousin Bernie Boston and his wife Peggy Boston that were taken at the Chickahominy Fall Festival and PowWow in Providence Forge, Virginia. He attended other Native American events that featured artists and cultural practitioners. Bernie’s purchases of handmade arts and other products from Indigenous people were his personal way of respecting and supporting their culture. He was well known for wearing a hat with handmade silver and turquoise ornamentation, his Indian jewelry, or playing an Indigenous American flute from his collection.

6. What can you tell us about the Boston family’s historical ties to the Pleasant Grove Methodist Church and cemetery?

One of my favorite photographs in my family collection is that of my Uncle Dick Boston (Bernie’s father) and our cousin Will Grayson Jr. Will Grayson Jr. literally helped build the Historic Pleasant Grove Methodist Church in McLean, while assisting his father Will Grayson Sr.

Will Grayson Jr. was the son of Mary Ellen Carter. Her father was James W. Jackson, the proprietor of the Marshall House in the City of Alexandria during the Civil War. Her mother was descended from Keziah Powhatan, the 18th Century Chief of the Fairfax County Tauxenent Indians. Mary Ellen was the sister of Bernie’s great grandmother Henrietta (the wife of William Harvey Boston). Descendants of both the Grayson and Boston families are buried in the Pleasant Grove Cemetery.

7. Finally, as someone close to him in his later years, how would you like people to remember Bernie Boston—as an artist, relative, and humanitarian?

Bernie Boston transitioned from this life on January 22, 2008, the day after my husband Michael Auld and I visited him for the last time.

Two celebrations of his life were held in his honor.

The first of the two was held in Washington, D.C., where he worked for many years.

The last celebration of his life was held in Bayse, Virginia, where he lived in his retirement years.

He chose Bayse for its quiet and natural beauty.

I traveled to Bayse to give a eulogy on behalf of his family.

I will always remember how dignified he was in the final moments that I had with him.

The last words I spoke to him were

“we love you Bernie”.