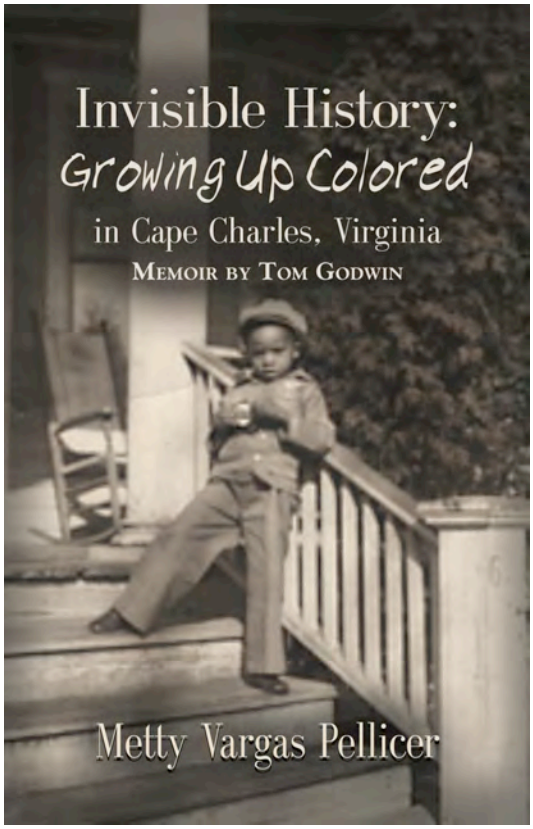

A personal recollection of growing up Black in Cape Charles, Virginia that is surprising in its details of family and community life and how robust was the parallel universe that evolved in response to the segregation of the Jim Crow era. This one man's account hopefully will contribute to move the races towards equality and social justice.

Invisible History:
Growing Up Colored in Cape Charles, Virginia

By A Memoir by Tom Godwin, As Told To Metty Vargas Pellicer

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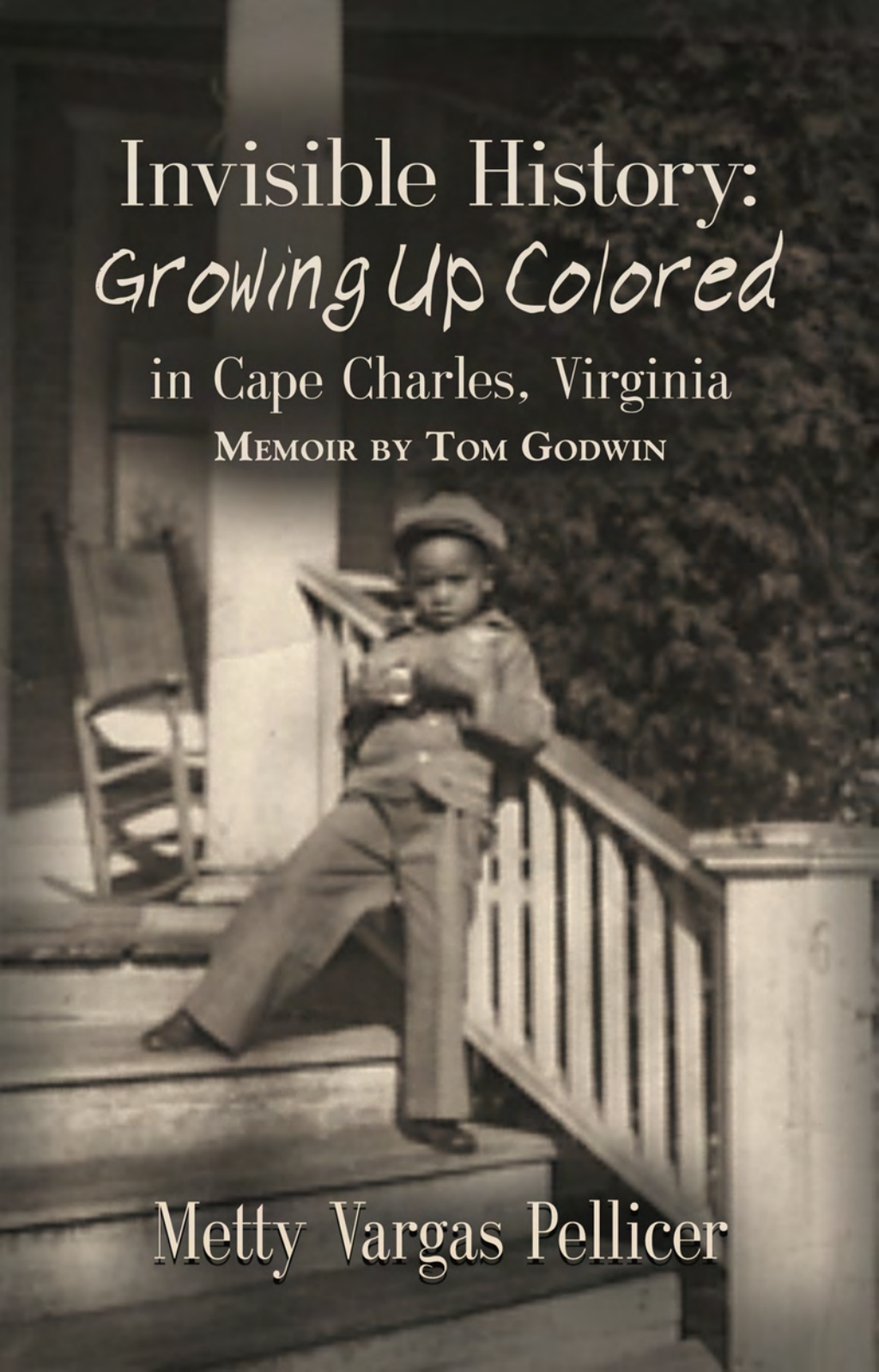
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Praise for Invisible History:
Growing up Colored in Cape Charles, Virginia
Memoir by Tom Godwin, As Told To Metty Vargas Pellicer

Miles Barnes noted Shore historian and Librarian of the Eastern Shore Public Library for 41 years.

"It is an important contribution to the understanding of the black experience in Cape Charles and on the Eastern Shore. The narrative is always powerful and is especially moving where Mr. Godwin speaks of his family and his faith."

Marion Naar, Past President: Cape Charles Historical Society, Museum and Welcome Center

"A most engaging memoir, at once intimate and universal. The book presents in his own words the vivid, moving life story of a sensitive, intelligent, and gregarious man through a period of great change for black Americans. Tom's long life and detailed knowledge of his own family history enables the account to extend from slavery times into segregation, the civil rights era, and the present day. Son of an economically successful family, Tom's description of life in a small segregated southern town is authentic and not without humor. Through his words one comes as close as would be possible to experience and deal with the daily insults, inequities and unfairness of life for a black person in a climate of unquestioned white supremacy, but within a town which also contained a vibrant and confident black community. The account is enriched by the author's framing Tom's core personal material in local and national historical context and adding observations from her own Filipino life experience. The book is a captivating read."

Mary Barrow, award-winning author of "Small Moments, A Child's Memories of the Civil Rights Movement"

The promise of our future is built on the foundation of our past. This carefully crafted memoir by Tom Godwin is a portrait of what it means to build a foundation. It is an honest portrait of Cape Charles, a small town in Virginia known as the 'Jewel of the Eastern Shore.' As told to and written by Metty Vargas Pellicer, it specifically traces the African American community's important contributions to the success of the town, a part of history that has been overlooked by earlier writers. It lays bare the joys, the accomplishments and the obstacles faced by African Americans as they built businesses, homes, schools, roads and lives that intertwined with their white neighbors. It should be read by students of social history. It should be read by the residents of the town and the state of Virginia. All of our futures are strengthened by acknowledging our shared foundations. It is a wonderful addition not only to the history of Cape Charles but also to the thinking of those concerned with the on-going disparities between the races.

Nancy Dalinsky, former resident of Cape Charles, now in Brussels, Belgium

This is your best book. It is professionally written, and the subject matter is very timely. It also puts Cape Charles into a historical context. This is my view about slavery:

Slavery is as old as the history of the beginning of homo sapiens. Even the ancient laws of Hammurabi, the Greeks and Romans so called democratic governance, King John's Magna Carta and the American Declaration of Independence addressed the issues of some human beings as being more equal than others.

It was what it was. But at the end of the French Revolution when the western world finally awakened and embraced the ideas of the Enlightenment (the right to dignity and freedom of every individual), then there is no more excuse for slavery to be part of any civilization.

Odelle Johnson Collins, former Board Member, Chesapeake Bay Bridge-Tunnel Commission

Thomas, my "over-the-hump" classmate and neighbor, has vividly depicted life for the Negro in Cape Charles during Segregation. Well done, friend.

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Preface

I first met Tom at The Historic Palace Theater event sponsored by the Board of Trustees and Friends of the Cape Charles Memorial Library to celebrate the Library's 100th Anniversary, "A Cape Charles Century, Past, Present, and Future."

In the theater lobby, another community group was distributing fundraising information about the Rosenwald School Restoration Project. I had never heard of these Rosenwald Schools before.

According to the fundraising pamphlet there were 4,977 built throughout the rural South during the era of Segregation with seed money from Julius Rosenwald, a wealthy son of German-Jewish immigrants, who became the CEO of Sears Roebuck, Company. Booker T. Washington, a former slave who had become very influential as an eminent orator and educator, believed that education was the key to improving the lives of African Americans. He and Julius Rosenwald became friends and in 1917, Julius Rosenwald established the Rosenwald Fund and with Washington's guidance these schools were built with active participation and support from the Black Community to support the construction of rural schools in the South, pay teacher salaries, and provide books and school supplies. These schools not only served as models of construction but became symbols of the African American community's determination to fight for equality and the key role of education in that fight. In Virginia, 364 such schools were built and the one just outside the Cape Charles historic district, located just past the railroad overpass bridge fondly called "the Hump" by locals, was the beneficiary of the night's fundraising event.

Before the Civil War, it was illegal in the South for Black children to go to school. During the Reconstruction, when free public education became possible, Black children attended school for the first time. These schools were at the mercy of local governments for funding and were woefully inadequate.

From the end of the Reconstruction in 1877, until the early 20th century, the Supreme Court ruled that it was constitutional for states to allow segregation in public facilities. Jim Crow laws were enacted in the former Confederate states. These laws were intended to restore White supremacy and to disenfranchise Blacks, limit their freedom and remove protections won after the Civil War. It was evident that "separate but not equal" became the norm in practice, a continuation of racist practices in the South since before the Civil War. The schools were especially vulnerable, since many European-Americans objected to African-Americans being well educated, fearful that they would no longer be content to remain in their traditional roles such as field and service workers.

These laws were named after a character called "Jumping Jim Crow," a minstrel act popularized by Thomas D. Rice. By painting his face with burnt cork, black shoe polish or greasepaint, he created a cartoon character of a Black slave as a dimwitted, grinning buffoon. This image, among others such as Sambo, the happy, lazy, child-like slave, Coon, the Black dandy, the Mammy or Aunt Jemima, Jezebel and Mandingo, sexually voracious types, Sapphire, Watermelon, Uncle Tom, Picaninny, etc., denigrated Blacks for the entertainment of White audiences and became cultural stereotypes. The minstrel show became a unique American theater form, and its popularity helped cement lies about Blacks. These images, found in posters, advertising, theater billfolds, and artifacts that are now seen by some as collectibles, were so pervasive that they served as subliminal icons retained in the minds of Blacks and Whites for over a century, and still inform the racist bias of today's generation.

From the end of the Reconstruction in 1877, until the passage of the Civil Rights Act in 1964, Black lives were governed by rulings and laws like those found in the Plessy v. Ferguson case in 1896. This era of "separate but equal" was characterized by urban migration, violence, lynching, the rise of the Ku Klux Klan, the formation of the NAACP, Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, sit-ins, protests, and demonstrations.

Paradoxically, it provided the environment that fostered the rise of Black entrepreneurs, intellectuals and writers, and gave birth to jazz, blues, spirituals, ragtime, hip-hop, rock and roll and rap; musical art forms that are uniquely Black and American. What is defined universally as American popular culture is a Black creation that is the unique legacy of slavery.

So, I was sitting in the back of the theater waiting for the program to begin and this elegant Black gentleman sat behind me. As he caught his breath, I remarked that he could rest easy, he had made it in before the program began. As we continued chatting, his story left an impression on me.

"I remember sitting in this same seat during the Civil Rights protest era," he told me. "I was part of a group that was discussing strategies of integrating the business establishments in Cape Charles. I happened to be passing by the Palace Theater, and something possessed me. I just walked in, and, you know, I'd never been inside this theater, I had no idea how it looked inside, we were not supposed to be here. Blacks were not allowed in this theater then.

"I walked in, I remember I was scared, but I didn't care. I had no idea why I did it alone. I was home after college, and I got active in the Civil Rights Movement while in school. I was familiar with Rosa Parks and the sit-in protests. It was an impulsive act; the idea hit me, and I just acted on it. I was so nervous I just went into the theater, don't remember if I bought a ticket or not, just walked in and sat in the first vacant seat I saw.

I forgot what was being shown, but I remember how scared I was the whole time. My heart was almost jumping out of my chest. I saw it pulsating through my shirt, my throat was closing, and I could hardly breathe. My whole body was tense, but I sat there immobile for what seemed like an eternity, and the people who were sitting around me, White folks, all looked at me and moved away without a word but with that disdainful look that I knew so well since childhood. And I was alone sitting there, waiting for something to happen. I didn't know what. And then someone touched me from behind and it sent chills down my spine. It was Officer Willis Mitchell, who was patrolling the theater, the first full-time Black policeman in Virginia. He knew me, and I knew him, and relief covered me like a warm cocoon and tension left my body. He didn't say anything, but he let me stay.

"That was in the '60s. Now, 56 years later, I can come here without fear of being arrested and without enduring the humiliation of White folks avoiding sitting next to me as if I were dirty or contagious, but I will always remember that time."

After the program began, he was called on stage as one of the storytellers, remembering the past century in Cape Charles.

I had just retired full time, moved to Cape Charles and had become very interested in its history. I lived just across from the Cape Charles Museum and one day I walked over, and was instantly fascinated by the exhibit of video interviews featuring students who attended the Rosenwald school over the Hump, the school that I learned about from the pamphlet distributed by the Rosenwald School Restoration Project at the Palace Theater where I first met Tom Godwin. He was one of the students interviewed. "The Hump" became a familiar term often mentioned in the interviews and fascinated me to know more about how life was like for Blacks in Cape Charles.

I chatted with Mary Morris, who further piqued my curiosity about local history when I learned that she had been working at the museum for 12 years and had just celebrated her 86th birthday. Like many local senior citizens I've met, she liked to remember how Cape Charles was

in the early days. I then went to the library to look for books about Cape Charles and found a few self-published memoirs, but most were memoirs written by White women about their idyllic childhoods or were books from the perspective of White men. I found a couple of memoirs written by African Americans about growing up as mixed race, but not specifically about growing up in Cape Charles.

I later became a member of the Cape Charles Rotary Club and discovered that Tom was a member too. When he brought Juanita, his wife, to one of our monthly social events, I sat with them during dinner and afterward felt like we were old friends. Later, he was invited to be our luncheon speaker to tell about his experiences growing up Black in Cape Charles. He also spoke about his desire to write about those experiences before his memory fades, but he didn't know how. This gave me an aha moment: to offer myself to write his memoir.

I had no credentials as a writer, except for two self-published books, one, a memoir of my travels, *Hello, From Somewhere: Stories of the Roads I Traveled* and the other, *From Miman With Love, A Grandmother's Memoir*, written for my granddaughter. I am a member of Mary Barrow's Memoir Writing Workshop and of Expressions, the Eastern Shore Writer's Group formed after we completed the class, but I presented my ideas to Tom about how to approach his story and we agreed to collaborate.

I chatted with Tom to determine how we would present his story; I listened and took notes and reconstructed his story from what he'd remember on that day. I wrote everything down as soon as we finished our conversation while the content was still fresh in my mind. I then had him review what I wrote for his approval, corrections, additions, etc. I mixed the interviews later with historical information, research, and information from Tom's correspondence and his notes as well as additions from Juanita and other parties, especially his sister, Jennie, and Ms. Odelle Collins. The chapter headings revealed themselves as the work progressed.

The Covid-19 pandemic presented some challenges as we were prevented from meeting face-to-face and had to rely on phone conversations and email. This was doubly challenging while Tom was solving problems with his internet connection and at the same time that his phone was not working well either. I hope I captured Tom's essence and voice and his point of view in writing his story.

Chapter 1: An Awakening

It is a surprise to me that I am not angrier and more bitter about my experiences of growing up Black in Cape Charles. I guess I have to forgive, but I shall never forget how it was like. It amazes me now that practically no one remembers that there were signs all over the establishments here during the segregation era designating areas for Colored and White, a constant reminder that you were limited in what you could do because of the color of your skin. And, the most damning of all, was the daily encounters with belittling acts inflicted upon you intended to make you feel like you are a nothing, an object, not worth paying attention to, best ignored and forgotten.

This attitude of the White establishment still exists today. By failing to acknowledge the presence and contribution of the Black community, which many deny as being intentionally racially motivated, the same attitudes of denigration and objectification based on the color of your skin are still being reflected.

My father earned his living as a building contractor laying down cement for sidewalks, foundations, and walls. He and my grandfather had helped build many of the buildings in Cape Charles and on the Eastern Shore. My father built the sidewalks of Cape Charles at its founding and they still stand today. He also laid the foundation of the Cape Charles Post Office. I knew that, and many of the Colored folks knew it too and it surprised me that his contribution was not mentioned among the builders and architects of the building by Postmaster Danhof F. Van Dyke, who gave a talk about the building in one of the Cape Charles Rotary lunch meetings.

The Post Office

There was a photo of the builders and my father was in it but he was ignored in the credits, as if he weren't there at all. It got me to thinking about the many Black-owned businesses in Cape Charles and their contribution to the economy and prosperity during Cape Charles's Golden era. So many of them are no longer active and will be forgotten if no one writes about them. Now that Cape Charles is having its renaissance, I am observing the same phenomenon, of how the Colored in Cape Charles are being overlooked in the recalling of its history. Because Blacks were classified as property, they were not given names and not recognized as persons with individual identities. They were represented merely as numbers among a slaveowner's properties and were counted as ⅗ of a person in every federal census through 1860. Our enslaved ancestor's stories were not recorded by the White custodians of historical documents and it was illegal to educate the slaves, so there were no diaries or memoirs or letters to discover from library archives or family possessions.

My generation still has information from family oral history about our grandparents who lived in the era of slavery. We are the last link to our ancestors. Our grandchildren will be so far removed from their heritage and our memory in the collective consciousness will fade into oblivion.

That annihilation of our existence sends a gut-wrenching wave of utter desolation that chills me to the core. There are few books written about or by Blacks in Cape Charles. It is up to us in the Black community to call attention to our presence by being alert to our representation in whatever is being disseminated in government brochures, tourist marketing pamphlets, newspaper articles, TV and radio shows, and local historical accounts.

Hopefully, other places in Cape Charles will attract the same restoration-based attention as the Rosenwald School Restoration Initiative. Places like the original site of Gray's Funeral Home, the oldest Black-owned funeral home on the Eastern Shore at the back of Mills Gray's house on 643 Randolph Avenue and Mitchell's Store on Jefferson Avenue, are the types of places that need to be remembered now before they are lost forever.

I hope to contribute by publishing my memoir so that future generations can read about these times and see whether the races have come together as equals in their time. It has not arrived after the Revolution with its lofty declaration that all men are created equal, it has not arrived after the Civil War and the Emancipation Proclamation, and, despite the Civil Rights Movement and Civil Rights Act of 1964, the races have not yet achieved the equality enshrined in the Constitution.

Thomas Jefferson himself held this belief in 1781 as the Virginia legislature was debating emancipation: "Deep-rooted prejudices entertained by the Whites, plus ten thousand recollections by the Blacks of the injuries they sustained, to say nothing of the real distinction Nature has made, would make it inconceivable to expect that Whites and Blacks, former masters and slaves, could live together

in the same society without resulting in divisions and social unrest, convulsions that will probably never end but in the extermination of one or the other."

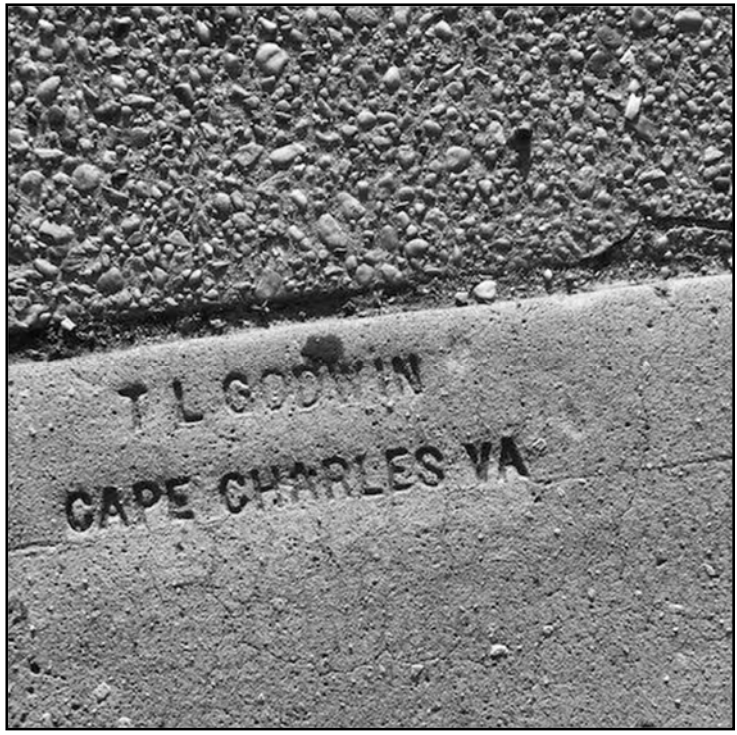
Lincoln too expressed similar sentiments in 1858, as a divided nation moved closer to war, "There is a physical difference between the White and Black races which will forever forbid the two races living together on terms of social equality."

Both did not see an end to the division and held the belief that there is an inherent difference between Blacks and Whites and proposed the solution of separation of the races, hence the founding of Liberia, a country in Africa to be colonized and ruled by former slaves, never mind that most slaves had been born in the USA, their home was the USA, they had known no other country but the USA, and they wanted to remain in the United States of America.

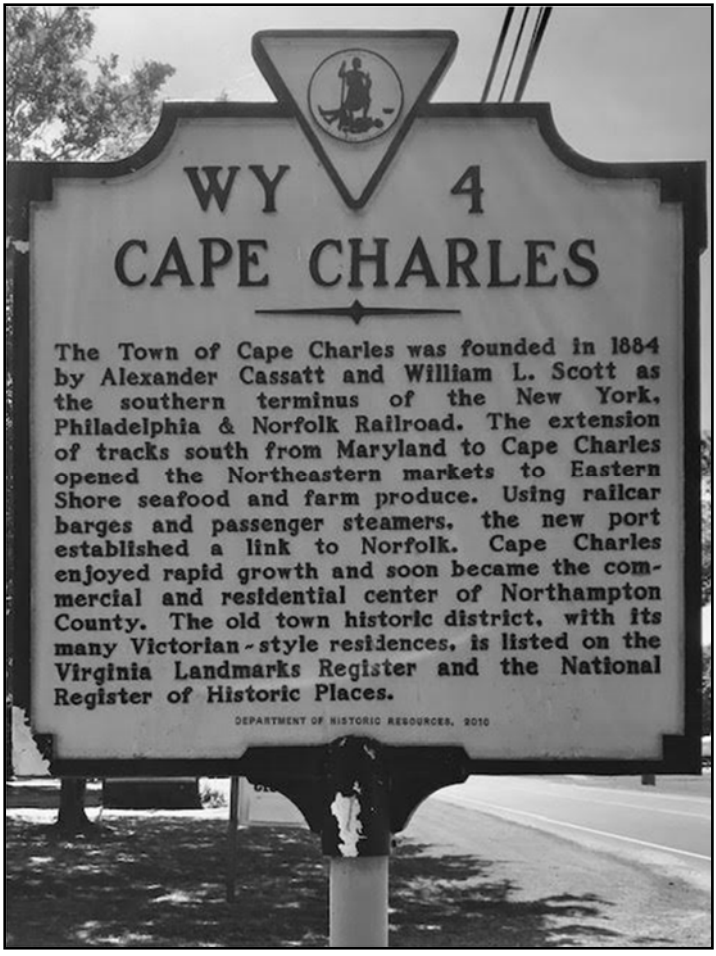
Therefore, most opted to remain in the USA and as we all know, we have yet to find ways to deal with slavery's legacy. The belief held by Whites that Blacks were by nature, inferior found its legal expression in the separate but equal laws of the Jim Crow era. But, Martin Luther King, Jr. came along with a dream of true equality and in the years since the 1963 March in Washington and the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the US has made great strides in realizing the ideals of the Constitution by achieving legal equality. But the struggle for true equality continues in order to close the gap that exists in education, employment, health care, housing, and opportunity in the pursuit of happiness.

My grandmother, Candis Scott Godwin, was a slave when the Civil War broke out, and lived long enough to see her children achieve success and respect. After getting married to Jacob Godwin, a veteran of the 10th Regiment USCT, she moved to Cape Charles shortly after its founding, and here my father was born. She died in 1938 at the age of 84, before she could see me go off to college. She lived through the tumultuous period of adjustment after slavery and during the Reconstruction and segregation era. She did not see the crumbling of

the foundation on which the principle of separate but equal laws rested in the Jim Crow era, that the end of legal slavery did not end the story of racism and that we continue to have the ups and downs in our quest for a bi-racial society that Jefferson and Lincoln could not visualize, that although the struggle for true equality gained momentum until a Black president was elected, the gap in education, employment, health care, and housing that perpetuates inequality of opportunity for Blacks continue to exist, so long as White privilege is not acknowledged and the will to control it is not embraced.



My father's mark on the town's sidewalk



The Historic Marker

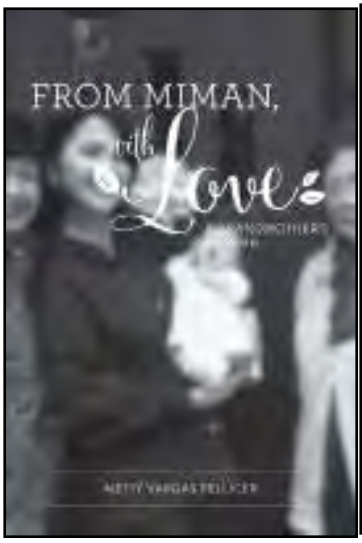
The Cape Charles water tower

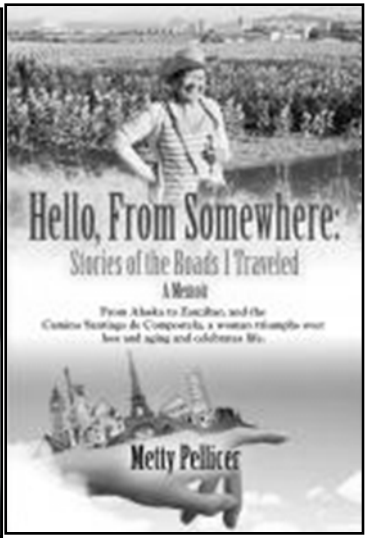
Welcome to Cape Charles, sign on Randolph Avenue

About the Author

Metty Vargas Pellicer aka Metty Pellicer, Metty Vargas, Fiameta Vargas, Fiameta Pellicer, Fiameta Vargas Pellicer, is a grandmother, mother, woman, and doctor. She was born in the Philippines in 1942 and immigrated to the US in 1967 after graduating from the University of the Philippines College of Medicine. She was married to John Pellicer for 35 years until his death in 2004 from coronary heart disease at age 58. English is a second language and she speaks two of the Filipino dialects, Tagalog and Bicolano, *y un poquito Espanol.* She has published two books, "Hello, From Somewhere: Stories of the Roads I Traveled" and "From Miman, With Love: A Grandmother's Memoir".

She moved to Cape Charles, VA in 2017 and is happy in her retirement with new friends, travel, exploring the rich history of the Eastern Shore, writing, and gardening. Her books can be purchased at:





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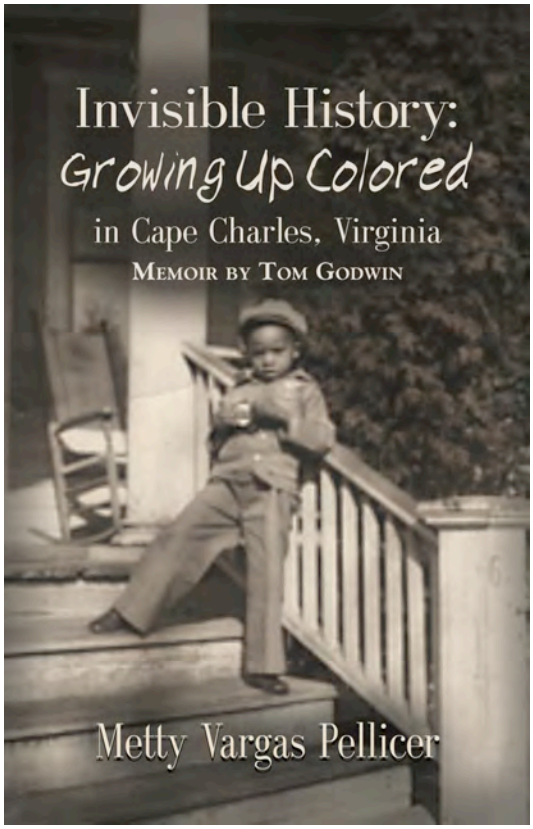

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