

## **TRIPS DOWN MEMORY LANE IN HOPEWELL ARE NOT ALWAYS SO PLEASANT**

The “old days” in Hopewell were not as joyous for me and my family as they were for Joan Holland. In her “commentary” of several weeks ago, she elaborated on how wonderful the retail establishments in downtown were for the “people” of Hopewell. She also mentioned recreational facilities such as Moore’s Lake, Crystal Lake, and Red Water Lake and their popularity, as well as how the “people” loved them. The retail establishments she mentioned by name, which included George’s Drug Stores (Numbers 1 and 2), Woolworth’s and W.T. Grants, as well as many other eating establishments, routinely discriminated against a large portion of the citizenry of Hopewell denying them entry into their establishments, or, if they were allowed entry, refusing to let them sit and eat on the premises. My mother could buy clothes at a number of the women’s shops Ms. Holland wrote about, but, unlike the white women, she was not allowed to try them on before she purchased them. The “wonderful” movies playing at the Beacon Theatre and the Park Drive-In were for white citizens only.

Today, politicians and writers such as Ms. Holland talk about returning to the “old days”, as though the persons who were discriminated against would enjoy returning to a time of riding in the back of the bus, drinking out of separate water fountains, and being refused admission to public facilities such as the library, the city cemetery, and the so-called public pool in City Point. I will also never forget having to go into the backdoor of doctor’s offices, and using a separate entrance to the bus station. On the occasions when we visited the Bellwood Drive-In on Route One, I would wonder why the white children had all kinds of recreational equipment to play with at the front of the drive-in, while we had no recreational equipment to play with in the segregated section for blacks, which was in the far back rows of the drive-in.

As a young child, my parents insisted on the city allowing us to swim in the public pool located in City Point. Rather than allowing all of its citizens to enjoy the cool waters of the tax-supported, city-owned facility, the decision was made to fill the pool with cement. Eventually, the recreation department replaced the pool with two tennis courts, so my father bought me and my brother tennis racquets. I became a good player, and participated in many tennis tournaments in Virginia, Maryland and Washington, DC.

During my time studying music at Carter G. Woodson High School (Woodson), the materials provided by the Board of Education for the Music Department were very inadequate. The Instrumental Music Program only survived because of the dedicated work of teachers such as Mr. Maclin, Mr. Taylor, Mr. Bellamy and Mr. Hall. One year, Hopewell High School (Hopewell High) received new band uniforms and gave their “discarded” uniforms to Woodson. Unfortunately, they only gave the school twenty uniforms, despite the fact that there were about fifty members in the Woodson Marching Band. I was one of the “fortunate” members who received a blue and gold tattered uniform, even though our school colors were maroon and gray. The rest of the band wore white pants and shirts.

In 1963, as the result of a court order, I transferred to Hopewell High and was surprised by the number of extra-curricular activities offered to allow for a complete educational experience for the students. At Woodson, the only sports offered were basketball and baseball, but at Hopewell High, a full array of sports teams were a part of the school’s extra-curricular activities (basketball (boys and girls), baseball, track, volleyball, etc.). At Woodson, the music program included band and chorus, however, both programs were poorly funded, which resulted in the inability of the music teachers to have the programs reach their full potential. In contrast, Hopewell High had several types of vocal groups and a large instrumental program that allowed

students to perform at football games and venues outside of the city. Despite the inequities between Woodson and Hopewell High, and the demeaning treatment I received at Hopewell High, I became a Band Director and taught school for 35 years.

Included in my remarks are just a few of the advantages white citizens of Hopewell enjoyed that were denied to its African American residents. The last paragraph of Ms. Holland's commentary, where she talked about "old times seeming like a dream", caused me to understand why there is still such a racial divide in our country today. While white citizens of Hopewell talk about the old days as a "dream that exists only in the pleasant past," I remember having a bomb thrown into my home, and later, into my parent's restaurant next door to our home. While Ms. Holland wants a return to those times, my thoughts are of a burning cross placed in my front yard, and of insulting notes and ugly drawings being placed in my school desk at Hopewell High. I long for uplifting discussions on those "old days" to determine why those times had to happen, and positive ways to ensure that no group will ever have to endure the discriminatory practices of that era. Discussions along these lines should help curb commentaries, such as Ms. Holland's, that continue to be insensitive to certain citizens of Hopewell.

Respectfully submitted,

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