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## MY MEMORY OF COUNCILL HIGH SCHOOL

I graduated from Council High School in 1966 and after the high school closed due to integration, I returned to the school to work in 1968 while the elementary school was still in operation. I was a teacher's aide with the Educational Improvement Program developed by Federal Programs to give Early Childhood students a "Head Start". My journey with the high school began in 1961 after my family moved to the south side of Huntsville, Alabama. I withdrew from the 7<sup>th</sup> grade at Calvary Hill Elementary, one of the city's Black feeder schools, to attend the city's only Black high school. Most of the students who lived on the south side of the city had been at Council since the first grade. The school housed Elementary, Junior and High school students. It didn't matter where or what kind of school you started in across the city of Huntsville; West Clinton Elementary School, Calvary Hill Junior School or a private church school, you would eventually enroll at Council High School because of your race.

Many students had become friends because they practically grew up together and had spent so many years in the same school. The teachers knew them and their parents as they passed through the grade system. I had been in at least four different schools since I started so I didn't have that experience at Council like many of them did. I was new to the school and the neighborhood. I made friends with several older and younger students during the five to ten-minute walk from Madison Street to Pelham Street.

In school, I quickly learned the common theme heard in the hallways and classrooms of the school "You follow the rules, and finish your lessons". You didn't want trouble from any of the teachers and especially from Mr. Horace Fields, our principal. I don't remember seeing him smile but I did remember the stare. One day I saw him standing in the hallway where he stood most days because he could see in several directions from that point, mainly the girl's and boy's restrooms. The main spots where students would hang out when they wasn't in class. There were no other students in the hall at that time. I didn't think he knew me, so feeling out of place, I tried to pass with ease on my way back to class. He said, "Madry, where are you supposed to be?" I was surprised that he knew my name but not afraid because he was soft-spoken and quite proper, not as harsh like I thought he would be. I answered and quickly went to my class. I realized that day that no student was invisible at Council.

I had average academic grades but I struggled in math. I had taken a math class under Mrs. Helen Fearn's class but felt it was too large and she appeared to have no patience with slower student, so I was assign to Mr. Roper, a mathematician, and he became my teacher. Once he was aware of my struggle, he would stop by my desk to do one-on-one teaching until I was able to understand what he had taught that day. That class left an imprint upon me to this day. I learned the importance of a teacher making a real connection with students and because of him, teaching became my career.

Attending sport games were my main activities during my high school years. If there were a football games and the band played, I would follow when they traveled to play other black teams in the city or the state. Basketball was my favorite although I was not a great player. Whenever there were basketball games at school or the Scruggs Street Community Center, I was there. The only time I played on teams was in my physical education class and because of my love for the game; I was selected by my P.E.

teacher to play a competitive game against the lady teachers. It was a fundraiser and I made the only score for our team.

The highlight of my junior year of 1965 I qualified for the Diversity Occupation Program (D.O.). Many felt at that time that students who excelled in the Liberal Education Curriculum or had an intellectual foundation did not need to take D.O. because it only prepared students for industrial education. Mr. Willie Mingo Clark, the instructor, counseled and educated students in technical and vocational skills. Then he scouted different businesses to find employers who would be interested in hiring part-time students to learn a trade on the job. I was okay with a D.O. program that taught you how to work, submit to authority, and "respect superiors".

My schedule was to attend regular classes until lunchtime then report to D.O. building outside of the school. I wanted to become a beautician because I already did my hair and a few folks in my neighborhood. I made a few dollars in doing so. Mr. Clark scheduled me to work in Mary's Beauty Shoppe on Church Street. Actually, working in the shop gave me so much experience. Mostly I cleaned and shampooed hair but in order to improve my ability in hot combing and curling hair, I had to secure my own customers to come to the shop, and do their hair under supervision. At the end of the year, the school had to attend a competition with other black high schools in the state. Council provided the transportation, room, and board in the Gaston Hotel. The event was in Anniston, AL. I had signed up for the cosmetology competition but did not qualify because I wasn't informed that I needed to bring my own tools. Never-the-less, I enjoyed the trip and students did win trophies to take back to the school.

In my senior year in 1966, Mr. Clark had extended his reach to larger industrial companies and corporations like NASA, Marshall Space Flight Center, Lockheed-Martin Corp., Teledyne Brown, and Boeing. He signed up Council students everywhere he could and during that school year, it no longer mattered what type of student you was in school, the D.O. program began to serve as the intellectual foundation for career preparation and was no longer limited to trades and skilled labor. Any students who wanted to build their career was allowed to take the class. On the job training and bringing home a paycheck, no matter how small, was a good thing for students.

On a typical day, right after lunch, a group of students would load up in Mr. Clark's car and head to MSFC. I was assigned to Shipping and Receiving, Building 4700, to do secretarial office work. He introduced us and the process started. We were orientated, badged, and taken to our office. Every two weeks we received a paycheck. Mr. Clark had prearranged everything down to how we would travel to work each day. I was assigned to ride with students who owned a car and we helped with the gas. The student that became my husband was assigned to a Courier position at MSFC that allowed him to drive a NASA vehicle to several buildings that included my building. After high school, the State National Bank hired him as a courier. Many of the students continued their education and were permanently hired back to position they held while in high school. Some students remained in positions that started in the D.O. Program.

That year, I graduated with my class and it was sad for many students in the 9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, and 11<sup>th</sup> grades as we found out that those grades were discontinued at Council and students were intergraded into schools.

where Whites only were attending.

After marriage and my first child, I returned to the Council School to start my career on the job training while attending Alabama A & M University seeking an education degree to become a certified teacher. After joining with other Council students and teachers, we formed an alumni association (WHCAA) to preserve the legacy of the school and Dr. Clark was a member of that board. Today at school class reunions, students continue to praise the late Dr. Willie Mingo Clark for the work he did for the students as a Diversity Occupation (D.O.) teacher of William Hooper Council High School.

Catherine Madry Stewart —Class of 1966

March 28, 2019