

Glenda McDowell

Side 1:

She came with her family to the "Big City" when she was 9 and attended the Mountain Street Elementary School (later called Lucy B. Herring). She attended David Millard (no longer here) during integration. There were no preparations for integration. They just "did it." She was in the 8th grade and found herself surrounded 10 to 1 with whites. She was sent for one year to Allen High School - it was predominately black, but the teachers were mixed. This was prestigious and she had to work in the kitchen to help pay for tuition. After 1 year her mother sent her north with family members to attend John Adams High School in Cleveland, Ohio. She graduated in 1969. Integration was "not working" for her. She returned to Asheville and worked in the area. She didn't like being told she was not college material. She went to airline school, graduated, and went to Washington D.C. where she became membership director of Air Traffic Controllers Organization (PATCO) after 8-9 years. This ended with the firing of air traffic controllers. At 28, not having found her "black knight," she decided to become a single parent. At 29 she had a daughter and at 39 she had a second child. She decided never to go on welfare. She joined the National Guard but, because of the children, refused to go to Desert Storm. She traveled around the US, living the "American Dream" but found it hard being a black female. [Ronald Reagan]

[47] She lives on Martin Luther King Jr. Dr. (see enclosed picture). The street has changed its name 4 times.

[49] She grew up on Valley St. (now S. Charlotte) when it was a slum. A collection of poor people lived there - liquor houses - prostitution - but still it was a community. In the north you "became a person" but here you never forget you are black.

[69] She returned to Asheville because her mother was ill and stumbled into mediation through the deacon at All Soul's Episcopal church. As a fair-skinned black she has always been able to work up from the bottom. She started answering the phone and now has the title of Director at Asheville High (coordinator of Peers Addressing Conflict Together (PACT), a mediation program jointly administered by Asheville High and The Mediation Center). [Joan Marshall]

[85] "Outspoken black females are tolerated - outspoken black males are killed." She tells about workshops where blacks are taught how to deal with their anger effectively. With a 14-year old daughter and a 4-year old son, she believes that it takes a whole community to raise children.

[116] She has been on the High School campus for 4 years. She works with students on a one-on-one basis helping them cope with being black and Appalachian.

[130] In 1989 she won the Martin Luther King Jr. award. She goes into prisons, works with the faculty on black history month and holds workshops to help blacks get strong and deal with their rage.

[167] She is willing to take risks and has written about being a single mother by choice. She said the black males have been killed off by Vietnam, have died by illness, are unemployed or are in prison. Her daughter is in the honors program.

[193] Her mother was a teenager when she was born. She had no parenting skills and her aunt raised her until she was 9. She left at 13 and lived with other family members. Her mother said blacks should be "seen and not heard" and was in constant fear she would get into trouble because she was outspoken. She, the mother, has been employed in the dietary section of the Memorial Mission Hospital for 40 years. When she became a single mother it broke her mother's heart.

[216] She is the only member of her family in the military. Next May, she will be a college graduate (sociology). She will be 45 and will have broken the "chain of poverty."

[240] Her generation didn't have a choice. Her son will get an education. Black children are the future (hope). [Shana McDowell, Peter McDowell]

[261] She teaches her children at home about leaders - not just white males. She is an Episcopalian because it makes her mother happy but considers herself basically highly spiritual and tries to live her life in accordance with her beliefs. [Malcolm X, Harriet Tubman, Michael Jordan]

[312] Her subject is conflict. Students come to her complaining about unfairness from other students or teachers. She says it is each person's responsibility to pull out of a situation what can help him. She is prejudiced against tall women - she is 4'11" and has to deal with that!

[388] There are "haves" and "have nots" in the school.

[395] She feels she has "lived history": Washington, DC where there are blacks everywhere; travel in the military where, in the Philippines there are no blacks; and US=rich; Egypt, where women are second class. "Being light black is a conflict in itself." This causes problems within a family. She has freckles, brown hair and talks southern. A sense of humor is necessary! She feels she is extremely fortunate seeing change happen within her life and is part of a break in the cycle of poverty.

[450] She has a foster child who is 3 months pregnant and angry because the city won't give her a 3-bedroom house. Glenda is paying the mortgage on her 3-bedroom house. "It has to stop. Why does a man have to take responsibility when we take it for him."

[509] She must quit looking at "them and us." Change must start with us.

[514] She has worked since she was 13. She had a job as a car hop. She lived in public housing for 2 years but was ashamed when a white woman asked her address and she said Livingston Heights. When she saw a walkie talkie left by an inspector in her house she felt violated and worked 2 years to get a down payment to move. [Don Harris]

Side 2:

She describes South Beaumont St. and Eagle St. This was a community eliminated with urban renewal. She said Eagle Street was vibrant - everyone went downtown shopping on Saturday. The Imperial and Plaza Theatres had back entrances for blacks (see Roy Gibbs tape) and they felt it was "their own" water from white drinking fountains that didn't taste any different. Though they could not eat inside Kress they had other places - a drug store in the YMI where the girls could watch the 10 barbers across the way give cuts. Everyone had their hair cut or done every weekend. She mentions the (Roland) jewelry store, liquor store, hotel, library, pool hall, cab stand, Allen Funeral Home. In Southside there was a drive-in theatre, nightclubs, cleaners. Homes were owned by the blacks. Stephens-Lee turned out fine people. People were poor but they had their own culture (see enclosure by Robinson).

[2/53] There were blacks in Montford but it was not prestigious. A Shiloh girl was thought to have money. Inner city houses were sub-standard. Montford is now more elite. Railroad workers lived or boarded there. Livingston Street was near the station and close to the track (see Marjorie Maxwell oral history).

[2/70] Her family made money through sale of liquor. She tells about churches and their community standing. St. Mathias was elite but Catholics had higher status. Her aunts were Baptist and relatives would come from the north for revivals. Circuit minister's appearance gave the people a "safe time" to get together and rejoice.

[2/102] Black men are knocked for leaving their families. They had to go north and work and they sent money back. Railroad workers had to travel - but men always wanted to be close to mama.

[2/119] Integration hurt the people. The teachers had mixed feelings and white teachers were difficult role models. She heard Ready talk to UNCA about blacks living on \$20,000 a year. She feels the educated blacks are dying out or leaving the city - leaving a low class (see Milton Ready oral history). [Milton Ready]

[2/170] Grove Park was considered the second plantation. She feels the black population is not large enough to support stores catering to blacks. One must look at demographics. In Washington DC, with a 75% black population, there can be soul food stores. Here, specialties must be sold as a side item. [Jesse Ray, Milton Ready]

[2/231] Young women have internalized depression and some need to have a baby to feel loved - and young men need to sire. Blacks are still stuck with, "You owe me my 40 acres and a mule." Now it's, "If you won't employ me, you will take care of me." She has gone on grants and scholarships and gives it back to the community saying, "Its not what someone gives you - it's what you work for."

[2/262] She does workshops in white churches on parenting, always does something for Black History Month, works on the National Coalition Institute on Racism, and trains trainers to work

to resolve conflicts. Any area of conflict can be addressed, i.e. dealing with irate customers.
[Sherri Bloom]

[2/315] She believes in responsibility and tries to change negative attitudes into positive motivation: i.e., how to turn a housing project into a neighborhood, how to deal with being called a "bitch."

[2/330] In school she sees students and teachers with unruly classes. She counsels individually and gives workshops.

[2/560] There is an influx of people moving down and minorities are coming into their own.

[2/384] Churches are still segregated. There is talk of diversity all week but on Sunday we go to our separate house of worship.

[2/404] There should be a clinic in every high school. Only 2% of the parents tell their children what they need to know. There have been 5 deaths of AIDS on Erskine Street. "There is a plague 2-3 streets from the High School." She gives information and condoms.

[2/440] Black girls don't have abortions. They can afford it but it is against their belief system.

[2/453] The welfare system has to be smashed. As long as you can have everything provided for you, you won't take responsibility.