

Johnnie

My name is Johnnie Mae Campbell Davis. I was born in Griffin, Ga., a small town in the South. My parents worked for owners of a large cotton farm. My mother was the cook, housekeeper, child care provider and did whatever she was asked to do. My father was a truck driver and did whatever he was asked to do. This was before integration, and poor people, especially Blacks worked very hard and were paid very little money.

My mom would take me to work with her so that I could play with the granddaughter. She and I had the run of the house as long as I was playing with her, but if not, I could only go as far as the kitchen. After lunch my mom and I had to work in the fields with everyone else.

My mom died when I was eight years old. My sister, brother, and I went to Warm Springs, Ga. to live with my grandparents. I loved going to school. All of my teachers said that I was a good student. The grades were 1st – 9th. There were no provisions for Black students to go to high school. White students were bused to another town for high school. I wanted to know why but got no answers. Black students had to ride the Greyhound Bus to the nearest town that had a high school for Blacks. I got a job babysitting for a wealthy White family and earned enough money for school. I worked after school and weekends. Completed high school and worked two jobs for a year to earn enough money for college. Worked as a live-in baby sitter with the people for four years and graduated from college with honors.

Met my children's father at the end of our senior year. He was an electrical engineer and worked for Boeing. I worked in Philadelphia, Pa. for a year and we got married and had three wonderful sons. They all graduated from college on scholarships, and have good jobs. I also have five grandchildren. I was fortunate enough to stay home and raise my children. I have had and am having a wonderful life.

Editor's Note: Johnnie teaches lessons about similarities. In a conversation over coffee and her delicious turtle cake, she revealed just how she does it. "People sometimes ask me what I'll call 'stupid questions,'" she said. "For example, one lady looked at me and asked why did my three sons go to college? Now, I thought for a minute and held back any anger over someone questioning why my sons, who are as Black as me, would do such a thing. Think about it. So, I turned the question around on her and asked, 'Why did any of your family go to college?' She

understood then that she'd answered her own question. My sons went to college to get an education just like anyone else, and they graduated.”