

“In high school today, you guys have your friends. And, you see them after school. And, you do whatever you do. Go to movies. Whatever. I didn’t have that...I never had that throughout high school.”

Dr. Betty Holston Smith

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A Reluctant Revolutionary

In June of 1956, Betty Holston’s father told her she was not going back to Carver, the “colored” high school in Rockville. Instead she would attend B-CC, the local high school a mile from her house. At first, Betty hated the idea. By the end of that first year, no one (and we mean no one) was going to convince her she did not belong.

BY BENNETT GALPER, GABE GEBREKRISTOSE AND KATHERINE JONES

For many high school students, the first day of school is filled with hugs and joyful chatter as they gather in the hallways, reconnecting with friends and teachers. For Betty Holston, the first day of school was filled with hushed silence and stares from white students.

She was not the only African-American student to enroll in Bethesda-Chevy Chase High School in 1956. There was Nancy Browne who lived on River Road in Potomac. But unlike Nancy, Betty lived on Hawkins Lane, an unpaved road that led to a small number of wooden homes once owned by freed slaves and now occupied by black families who held service jobs for wealthy white families in the area.

“We were segregated, of course, ” Dr. Betty explained, adding “but we are also isolated from other black communities.”

In short, Betty stood out immediately at B-CC for two reasons: she was definitely not white and her family was definitely not wealthy.





Betty (far right) on the “Lady Barons” basketball team 1957-58

A Rough First Year

Betty’s first year (10th grade) can be summed up with a single word - isolation. She was spat on, called racial obscenities, and was physically abused.

After being jumped on the way home on her first day, she never rode the school bus again. Although she lived a mile away, she did not feel safe walking through East Bethesda alone. So, everyday she took hours to get home by way of two city buses: one along East-West and one along Connecticut.

After a series of taunts at lunch , she never ate in the cafeteria again, choosing instead to get take-out from the back door of a local diner and eat her lunch while walking.

“I would go home every day and cry,” said Dr. Betty.

“11th grade was better”

“11th grade was better, meaning I was better,” said Dr. Betty. “But

everything else was the same.”

She still lacked friends. And, the administration demeaned her, advising her, at one point, to switch from an academic track to a commercial one because her “brain wasn’t developed yet.”

Despite these obstacles, Dr. Betty was determined to push forward. She joined the basketball team and the Biology Club. Her interest in biology stemmed from the hours she and her siblings spent in the untouched woods which are now Walter Reed Hospital.

“We could be free, running, playing and figuring out how to entertain ourselves. Because of segregation, we didn’t have playgrounds.”

More Resilient

Even when things were bad (and they got very bad), Betty’s determination did not waiver.

When her history teacher, for example, referred to her and all

African-Americans as less-than-human, Betty knew she needed to do something.

Betty leaned into whatever power she did have.

“I babysat for white families in Chevy Chase, including Maryland State Senator Edward Northrop.”

She wrote, rewrote and rewrote again a letter detailing her history teacher’s treatment of her and and left it on Senator Northrop’s desk.

Within days, she was called into the principal’s office and given a choice of other teachers. Betty refused to switch classes.

“I wouldn’t do that and run from the problem.”

Shortly after that, her teacher left the school.

Having grown up in the South, her father was not happy about this new assertive side of Betty.

“He grew up with a ‘go-along to get-along’ philosophy. My mother, on the other hand, was smiling.”

A semi-normal Senior Year

Her enthusiasm for education originated at home.

"My house was the 'homework house' of the neighborhood. Education was the route out of where we were."

Biology Club became one of many outlet for Dr. Betty at B-CC, kindling her passion for education and knowledge.

Graduation and beyond.

Shortly after graduating from B-CC in 1959, Dr. Betty got married and became a mother. She did not allow the demands of young motherhood, however, to derail her studies

"From the very beginning it was all about education,"

She returned to school and eventually earned a Bachelor of Science in Education, an MBA, a Masters in Public Administration, and a PhD in early and middle childhood education.

"I was passionate about education and learning and I just kept going,"

Dr. Betty went to work for the Department of Labor.

"I hated the job. But I always learned that whatever you are doing, you always do your best."

She went to work as a research assistant for a German Cardiologist at Walter Reed Hospital, working to develop devices that could help doctors diagnose heart diseases.

"I learned so much about

how the heart operates."

When tasked with interpreting cardiographs, she "nailed the diagnosis every time" because she memorized the patterns that of all the different heart diseases made.

Despite her expertise and prior educational experiences, Dr. Smith was denied acceptance into Georgetown medical school

"What Georgetown said was 'We don't do black students, female at that.'"

Dr. Betty was undeterred. She worked for two decades as an independent educational consultant.

Her knowledge of heart disease led her to a strict vegan diet and a fitness regiment that has her running 60 to 100 miles per week every week for the past 50 years.

Dr. Betty set the USA-Track and Field age group record for the 48-hour and 6-day ultra-marathon races.

She later broke her own record.

Living above

According to Betty, her parents felt that there was little that they could do about segregation.

"This is where you are. This is who you are. And this is what you'll have to learn to live with."

Dr. Betty took a different path.

"My experience at B-CC planted the seed for me, to live within the segregated world without being segregated. I created my own world high above."

Even in 1959, there were those who still refused to embrace the reality of school integration. One of the seniors pictured at left, actually whited Betty's picture out of his copy of the yearbook. We are not naming names.

Since graduation, Betty has developed close friendships with a number of her B-CC classmates.



Henry Herzog

Eleanor Hills

Dorothy Hinden

Dorothy Hochreich

CLASS OF '59

HENRY WILLIAM HERZOG
ELEANOR TOWNSEND HILLS *Kassai* 2; GAA 2, 3, 4;
Tri-Hi-Y 2, 3, 4; Pep Club 3.

DOROTHY CAROL HINDEN *Dramatics* Club 2; Spanish
Club 2; Chorus 2, Choir 4.

DOROTHY JOAN HOCHREICH *Chorus* 2; Library Club 4.

STEPHEN REID HOFF *Bridge* Club 4; *Pine Tree* Advertising 4; Transferred from Perkiomen Preparatory School, Pennsylvania.

CHARLES L. HOFFMAN

DAVID D. HOLMES *Varsity Golf* 2, 3, 4.

BETTY LEE HOLSTON *GAA* 2, 3, 4; *Biology* Club 4.

PHILLIP CHRISTIAN HOLT *JV Football* 2, 3; *Debate* Club 3; *SGA* 4.

CAROL JEAN HOLTON *GAA* 2; *Tri-Hi-Y* 2, 4; *Blue and Gold Handbook* 3; *Pine Tree Advertising* 4; *Twig* 4.

CHARLES TERRENCE HORAN

ARTHUR SIMEON HORN



Stephen Hoff

Charles Hoffman



David Holmes

Betty Holston



Phillip Holt

Carol Holton

C. Terrence Horan

Arthur Horn