

Fond memories of Nelson Merry

Julie Taliaferro preserves history, school days in photo collages

BY KIMARY CLELLAND
REPORTER

"I love to give folks a living history lesson," exclaims Julie Taliaferro, who is proud she graduated from Nelson Merry School in 1959.

"Kids were bussed in to the school from as far away as White Pine," she explains. "We had students from first grade to twelfth grade - 150 students and six teachers. Everyone knew everyone, we all got a good education, and we all had a great time."

All Jefferson County black children were bussed to the Jefferson City school until 1965 when the school closed due to integration.

In 1929, athletic programs were added to the curriculum. Nelson Merry was known for its winning football and basketball teams.

Julie was always the tallest girl in her class, so she was a natural star for the girl's basketball team. In her junior year, she was on the championship team. Her best friends and team members Linda Mills and Linda Moore are a big part of her memories.

In spite of the fact the girls played basketball in the 50's, they were all required to wear either skirts or dresses to school. The

year she and her friends graduated, she talked her fellow seniors into wearing pants for one day.

"Since the entire class agreed to wear pants, we figured the principal would not send us all home," she recalls, laughing. "Well, it backfired when the principal decided to teach us a lesson and send us all home to change clothes."

During her high school years, Taliaferro also enjoyed the newly-constructed library and commercial building. She gained a new appreciation for photos when she took a photo development class.

When the local girl graduated in 1959, she moved to Harlem, New York looking for work. She landed a job as a hospital clerk and eventually became the supervisor. It was there she met her late husband Robert, and where their two children were born.

Almost 27 years later, when her mother passed, she returned to her childhood home in Jefferson City. Taliaferro's son Dave went to middle school and high school in Jefferson City. Sadly, her daughter passed away.

"Jefferson City is a great place to raise kids," she comments. "Dave was happy here and now he works as a sergeant for the Jefferson County Sheriff's Department."

Her one grandchild Devon is on the JCHS track team and ready to graduate this May.

"Time always goes by so fast and the photos are special to remind of all the good times," says Taliaferro, fondly.

She also loves sewing and organized a traditional African fashion show at her church, Boyd's Chapel, eight years ago. She enjoys making aprons and hobo bags out of old jeans and still has large dolls she sewed for her children 35 years ago.

Taliaferro shares her days at Nelson Merry School by creating photo collages she displays at community events. She has collected some blue ribbons at Old Time Saturday for her collages, and is always eager to talk to people about her hometown school that was such a big part of her history.



KIMARY CLELLAND | THE S-B

Taliaferro made these dolls with their traditional African clothing 35 years ago. Her children enjoyed playing with them when they were young.

KIMARY CLELLAND | THE STANDARD BANNER

This elaborate photo collage was created by Julia Taliaferro. Nelson Merry School was well known for their winning football and basketball teams. Since she was always the tallest in her class, she was a star for the girl's basketball team.