

Dessa Edyth Parkey Blair  
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I came from the little poor town, County rather, Hancock County in Tennessee. Sneedville was the county seat, but my post office was in Tazewell, Tennessee. I was born in Hancock County and we lived in an all-white neighborhood. My father's family and my grandfather's family were the only families in the little country neighborhood. We did not have school or Church in our community, so of course you didn't integrate with the whites at that time. My father taught me at home, grades one through four. He carved me my alphabets on a wooden paddle. There were six of us, eventually and that was so that the others could use that same paddle to learn their alphabet, so when they became of age. And for the extra reading, we read the newspaper that was plastered on the walls, to clean up the room, you know. I was very inquisitive and was always asking questions about letters and whatever was on the wall. Now short, they are trying to make this short. In Hancock County, they had six families on the fringes of Claiborne and Hancock. So they went across the Hancock and Claiborne line and went to the Claiborne County school. So was my aunt, her property bordered the county line. Hancock and Claiborne. What I'm about to tell you is that I stayed with my aunt Pearlee and went to the Claiborne County school elementary school and in the fourth grade. And my father being a veteran of World War I in the years from 1914 and 1918. So he met the courts in Sneedville, Tennessee, often, until he could get a black school erected on the border of Hancock and Claiborne. Then we were able to walk five miles to school every day. Of course the other Black children are on the line, down there at Hoop Creek, and they didn't have far to walk. We had five miles to walk to school.

Now, so I started in fourth grade, there at the new school erected. And a white guy who was a Parkey and we were Parkeys. I'm sure slavery thing, a slave thing somewhere way back in history, because there's a lot of Blacks and whites who have the same names. Anyway, I went to fourth grade in the newly erected school, in the black neighborhood on the fringes of the county line. So from there, I went to the school my dad was lucky enough to have built. I, okay, I did the fourth grade. My teacher skipped me from the fifth grade. From the fourth grade to the sixth grade. When I got in the sixth grade, the county was so poor they closed the schools. We didn't get but five months of school that year from that County. But in the meantime, while I was staying with Aunt Pearlee, at the school the school teacher was walking with us, staying with my Aunt also, to the Claiborne County elementary school. By then, he was coming from Kentucky in a one-seater car and he was taking the good road around to the school then. So then, my Dad approached him and he took three of us, all three of us in that one-seater car to his school. Who was my first teacher in the beginning, when I was staying with Aunt Pearlee.

Okay I got through that, you know, then I went to Middlesboro, Kentucky and finished high school there. Then I went to Rogersville for my first year in college. Only went one year. I didn't stay on campus. I stayed in the city, so I don't know a lot about the campus life and that kind of

thing. But anyway, I was successful in going there and I got a prize for being the best all-around student in the college department there. Okay so we didn't have to pay every year in tuition. Tuition there. So, I was only there one year and then I went to Morristown College and got my other year in junior college.

But where Swift comes in the most for me, is in my elementary years at the new school that my dad had, it was successful in getting built, all of my teachers, every last one of them came from Swift. Now that's where I got impressed and taught for real. Black women couldn't do anything much but teach school, then. And I was so impressed with them and i just admired them. And I wanted to be like them. And from an early childhood on, my dream was to be a school teacher. And I got the best education and foundation from those teachers that came from Rogersville. I compare them with anybody. I went to Morristown College, I graduated from Knoxville College as valedictorian. I went to University of Tennessee and received a masters. I will compare those teachers with the will and the skill, of being the best. Now that's how I feel.

The cheapest place I could go and the closest place. Because they really wanted us at home at that age. Now the later ones were not quite. As my younger sisters came along, ten years later, from us the first four. And those new ones that came in, they were not as apt as the ones I had. I have to say that too. We went to (Hoop Creek) for church. I wrote a whole article about that, about being we had to go there for church.

William Isom: I'd heard about students having to ride the bus from Hoop Creek to Morristown to go to school.

They did at that time. They rode the bus all the way across that mountain (Clinch Mountain). Sneedville. Across that mountain to Morristown Junior College everyday. Everyday. They did that. My younger cousins. But they were in Claiborne County. They didn't have any bus, they didn't have a set up for that. But that was after they started putting a bigger emphasis on integrating. That's what caused that, they finally cut it out. But that's a long bumpy ride, over that mountain everyday. I'm glad I didn't have to do that. It'd beat you to death.

From Swift, I was an elementary student major, I had very good teachers there, very good teachers there. But most of my influence came from those teachers that were trained in Rogersville. That's where most of my influence comes from. And they didn't have to do much to me, I was all excited about. In fact, I just had a vision. Teaching was my divine calling from out of those hills and only by the grace of God could you get out of those hills and get an education, if you had a Black face. That's the way it was.

But it so happened my dad was a very bright guy, multi-talented. Had more to offer the little country community than any other one person living there, because he was so talented; blacksmith, gunsmith, watchsmith, all those things. Plus, he was a good manager. I was reared on a 66 acre farm and there were six of us, all of them are gone, but with two and we still own it. Got a nice young white family living in it with about two or three little children and their mother,

her mother is living in my Aunt Pearlee's house, where I stayed, with the teacher and walked to Claiborne county school. Hoop Creek.

That's my story. I've got several stories, the News Sentinel put out one. Up in Tazewell, they've got the story about the Hoop Creek thing. About my going to Hoop Creek and about this white McNeil family that gave the church, way back when. The house that also became the school house. And then as life went on, we had some old-timey deacons there and we were selling, you know, to buy extra things for the school, blah blah blah. And there was a division about it. So they gave it up and had a school built in the center of the Hoop Creek community. And that was built about 1945. And then the church stayed there for a while and it became dilapidated. And as old spiritual we used to say about, "this building that's got a leak and we got to move, so that's what we did. To the center of Hook Creek again. And when they got the new building built and everything, I was some kind of speaker for this new building that they built. Because my daddy had done so much for it, being a carpenter as he was.

I think of how, how could've I missed this. My pastor says all the time, "Oh you missed it. Let me come again. How can I missed it?" My dad he spent four years in the military and then he went to West Virginia and stayed with his sister and worked in the mines and all that kind of thing. I said "Why in the world did you come back up here in this hollar, when you knew there was no school for children?" But his father gave him two acres of land. He built a house on it then. And when he and my mother married, he moved into his house. Because he was not going give half of his earnings to the sharecropper. He was not and he taught that hard to us. There was not but one of us that rented for a little while. Every one of us, when we married we had our own house. Every one of us. Except Hazel, she probably rented about 6 months and then my parents helped her buy. My dad. Is the main person here. Plus the man above. Look, that's my story.

Do you know Goins? I mean lives in Rogersville. He goes back and forth to Sneedville up there. He's a renowned author. Yeah buddy. I wrote, well that was a lady up there, from Sneedville first wrote this story that I'm telling you. Jack wrote me a letter and had me crying. He said they lived close to Sneedville, see and they were as poor as Job's Turkey or something of that kind. And as far as he could see, Lawrence Parkey was the most intelligent man at the head in the County. And he wrote me a letter describing the situation and whatnot. And then I called him about a year ago and he was still over there in Sneedville and I wrote my story also in the history of Hancock County book. You can get that in Sneedville, Tennessee, too. I didn't know anything about Hancock County, Volume One. I didn't even know they had it. So the white family next year, we were just like family. She wrote and said, they're writing this book, putting another book out about us. You need to put Lawrence and Roxie in there. I said "I sure do." So I didn't even know the book was out or they were doing that or anything. So I caught Volume 2. I was in Knoxville and we were going to a meeting, over here in right out from Tazewell over there at the school. And they had this book one in the library there. First time I've seen it, you know. Hancock County, you know. My Lord there wasn't a Black face in it nowhere. Nowhere. And said, well, I declare. But I didn't know they were going to do a second one or anything, but

my neighbor from home, said "Hey. You need to put Lawrence and Roxie in that book. And they're in there. All of us are in there. Short article. And it's called The History of Hancock County, or something. Volume 2 now. I missed One, I didn't know it existed.

"You should write a book."

Oh they tell me that everytime i tell that story. It is something to behold. You know, I could have missed it Ruth.

"You should write a book. Who are you going to pass it down to?"

I got several articles around and about. You know Fred Bedell, was the superintendent during that time in the integrated school (in Knoxville)

Because of the sulfur springs and all that was around it. That's where I got my mouth and my boldness from, my Dad. Because when he met those courts and I told them he fought for four years for all of them, for freedom of all of them. And his children have nowhere to go to school, something wrong with that. So we got a new school. He had a lot of influence anyway. He wasn't afraid to stand up and speak for right, I don't care whether it was in the schoolhouse or the church house or my house. Tell it like it is.

I would just like to say, the competition was very strong there (at Swift College). When I was there, we had two brothers, Gene Grey. You might have heard of Gene Grey that helped desegregate the University of Tennessee. And they were brothers and myself my sister was there when I was there. And you talk about competition. Oh the competition was strong, but it was the healthy kind. They were good students, Gene was a real good student in chemistry and all that. And everybody is trying to beat each other, in that way. But now you try to outdo somebody now, they'll call you all kinds of names. I mean it's prevalent. Sometimes students don't want folks to know that they're doing well and acelling. Because of the "Nerd" and all that crazy stuff. I don't know where they came. From Mars or somewhere.