

The John S. and Drucie R. Chase Building Archive
Bda_cba012
Theme 1 - Education

Mr. Clifton:

You know, if you don't have a good concept about yourself, you're going to have some real, real challenges. When I mentioned the fact that it was expected, that we would do well, that expectation carried over not only in the home, but at school and the rest of the community. They didn't want us to experience some of the things that they had to experience. That's why education was so critical.

Vonnye:

Fourth grade was Ms. Thompson. Ms. Thompson taught us everything that we needed to know and then some... We did geography, we did handwriting, you name it. And we learned it.

Lydia Moore:

We started the year, in the sixth grade, we hit it running. We went to the science fair when I was in the sixth grade, the class did. The school did. Lots of kids told me they didn't even know what the science fair was. Didn't hear about it until they got to junior high or high school. We took Spanish for nine weeks in the sixth grade. Everybody, not just me, everybody. Back at that time, Austin Independent School District used to take the kids to the symphony, I believe it was the first Tuesday in the month. You'd dress up, the buses would come to get you, and we would have studied the orchestra pieces before we went. So we knew what was going on with different instruments and it's so vivid in my mind, even these years later, that I learned those things as a child in school.

Mr. Clifton:

Going back to my elementary school, F. R. Rice was the principal of Blackshear. He was an outstanding educator. He was a man before his time. And if I'm not mistaken, Blackshear was the first school to have a full-time certified librarian. He also started a lunch program at that school, and he believed in a holistic approach to education.

Lydia Moore:

A friend of mine and I occasionally sing our school song. Now, who remembers their elementary school song? But we remember parts of it because it was so important, Mr. Rice had us sing it often, so that, without thinking about it, you bonded to the school. I guess his focus or the way in which he presented himself, he expected us to be our best. He expected us to do our best. And so you were always pushing, trying to do better. He was not a principal that we didn't know. The kids knew the principal. He came around the building. We talked to him. And so that made an impact on me when I became a teacher. It was important that the kids knew you, not just as the person in the office.

Patricia Calhoun:

Kealing was just around the corner from my house. My dad was one of those like Mr. Rice. I'd say both of them were keenly interested and dedicated to the education of their students.

Lydia Moore:

And as I moved on to upper school, I learned, yeah, I did have great teachers. Because I knew a lot and it wasn't just me, it was other kids that I knew who had gone to Blackshear. We had learned a great deal,

Mr. Clifton:

Even though the University of Texas, for example, was not open to graduate students at that time, for the most part, they opened up later, many of our teachers attended school in San Antonio that were open to African-Americans for graduate school. As a matter of fact, my mother went away to study for her master's degree in Houston.

Patricia Calhoun:

During that time of segregation, our teachers had to go out of state to get their graduate degrees. And so our teachers were educated in the best schools in the country. So typically, Columbia, University of Michigan, the West Coast, East Coast, all of the top schools.

Lydia Moore:

So, I know that Blackshear was progressive. They were moving us forward in preparation for integration, which of course we didn't have any idea, but they knew. In 1960, when the City of Austin opened up the schools to allow Black kids to go choose whichever junior high they wanted to go to, we had been told we would be the first group to have that opportunity, go anywhere we wanted to, but then we'd be ready. We need not be afraid. We need not feel inferior, but we would be ready.

Patricia Calhoun:

One of the things that desegregation did, it disrupted our community. When you have a cohesive community, which we did. You have support of everybody. So with desegregation, unfortunately it was looked at as, "Well, certainly, your schools are not up to the standards of the White schools, so your schools should close and you guys come over here." I wonder if it might not have been more successful if it had been a blend of both. "Your students come here, some of our students go there," but you have this good mix. What happened was that teachers were dispersed all over the city. So, Black teachers didn't have the support that they were accustomed to. We really lost our sense of community.

Vonnye:

I am proud to say that I am a fourth-generation educator. I am a third-generation college graduate. My mother taught school in Houston, called Blackshear school, and my father ended up being a principal at Blackshear school in Austin.

Mr. Clifton:

Even though we had old books, they supplemented those old books with other materials to make sure that we were getting up-to-date instruction.

Patricia Calhoun:

The facilities may have lacked some of the things that the White schools had, but our teachers were very well prepared. What was difficult was the administration having to fight constantly for the tools and that was the big inequity.

Mr. Clifton:

Because we learned in old school, old books, some of the books that I had, I didn't even have room to put my name in it because everybody on the other side of town had had that book. But we still learned, we had good teachers who were energetic and enthusiastic about what they were doing.

Interviewer:

Absolutely.

Patricia Calhoun:

I was the second African-American to go into the school of design. The first, she graduated, but she wasn't successful in the field. And so I was discouraged every step of the way. Don't you want to change? Don't you want to change? You're not going to make it. Looking back on it, I think it sure would've been a lot easier if I had changed. You were always scrutinized a little differently.

Vonnye:

The bottom line is, by the time we got to junior high school, we were ready for junior high school. By the time we got to high school, we were ready for college. But the thing that is interesting and that you have to remember, many of my classmates who did not go to Anderson, they were just as smart or smarter. Why? Because of the teachers that they had. They made sure that they had everything that they needed academically to succeed.

Mr. Clifton:

They all believed that we were capable of doing great things and learning. They believed that, and they taught us as though we were going to achieve. So we had good concepts about ourselves.

Lydia Moore:

That we were not only taught. We were nurtured. It was important that we did our best, and we knew that we were doing well, we were succeeding, and they made a big to-do about it.