

horrors of racism and segregation in restaurants, movie theaters, barber shops, clothing stores, etc.

### Life in Forest Hill

In 1960, I was entering the 7th grade just as my parents had completed building a home in a small black community directly behind Central Consolidated. There were advantages to living in Hickory. My new home was modern, I could walk a short distance to school, and my family attended integrated services at St. Margaret's Parish in Bel Air. But, oddly I missed and I yearned for the diverse neighborhood of Hawthorne Drive.

Racial tensions in the county over integration of schools were easing by 1963, and a few students received permission to attend white schools. A couple of years earlier I had wanted to attend John Carroll, the integrated Catholic high school in Bel Air, but my father fretted that my grades were not good enough to be accepted. I was concerned the high tuition could present a financial burden to my family. Now the opportunity to be part of integrating Bel Air High School presented itself. Just like the red carpet in church, the diversity of Hawthorne Drive, and the integrated services at St. Margaret's, I wanted to experience the world around me and to explore what life had to offer. I desired the same opportunities that

Page 4

white children enjoyed.

My dad was opposed to my attending Bel Air High, believing that persistent racial tensions, along with my mediocre grades, would quickly doom me to failure. My mother, on the other hand, said: "Let the child make up his own mind."

So for the 11th grade I decided to ride the school bus with the white children to Bel Air, even though I would be one of only a handful of black students in each grade. Finally, at age sixteen, I had the long-sought opportunity to interact with the larger world, and I was excited and eager to do just that!

Page 5



Notice: Negro League Recognition Night at Ripken Stadium tomorrow, Aug. 28<sup>th</sup> @ 6:30 PM. Call 1-888-747-5361.

Author: Maurice W. Dorsey, Ph.D.

Copy Editor: Jim Chrismer

Reviewers: Debbie Gibbons, Barbara Hersl, Jerome Hersl, Joan Wiggins and T. Roxann Redd-Wallace

AAH Committee: Evelyynn Clayton, Sarah V. Robinson, Sarah Smith, Ann Waters

[harfordcampaign42@gmail.com](mailto:harfordcampaign42@gmail.com)

## African-American History of Harford County, Maryland A Weekly Publication



**Maurice W. Dorsey**  
**Born to be a Trailblazer**  
Part 1 of 2  
**Pamphlet 0034**  
**August 26, 2016**

**Bringing Communities  
Together Through  
Sharing History**

*Cover: Maurice W. Dorsey, second grade, Central Consolidated School (1955)*

## **Introduction**

Maurice W. Dorsey, PhD, is currently 69 years of age and retired after 35 years of Federal service. As a black and openly gay youth in Harford County, he grew up during the difficult time of transition from segregation to integration. This pamphlet will cover Mr. Dorsey's life and his decision in 1963 to enter traditionally all-white Bel Air High School. Next week's pamphlet will cover Dorsey's experiences at the county's then largest school.

## **Life in Edgewood**

After being born on May 10, 1947 at my aunt's house in Baltimore, I was reared in Harford County for the duration of my youth. My parents, James Roswell Dorsey Sr. (see Pamphlet 0025) and Zelma (Curry) Dorsey, along with my brother James Jr., my sister Margaret (Peggy), and I lived at 20 Battle Street in the "colored project," the segregated part of military housing for personnel at Edgewood Arsenal. James and Peggy were seven and six years older than I, respectively.

In a uniquely related way, I remember well, at age five, going with my family to the Army Chapel for Catholic services. Blacks were relegated to the back two pews or the choir loft. However, I felt

drawn to the plush red velvet-like carpet at the front of the sanctuary. I would run up and enjoy the feel of the luxurious carpet, only to be retrieved and returned to the back. This may have been my first incidence of sensing that I was being kept from something that I wanted to experience.

In 1954, I entered the first grade and rode the Army bus with James and Peggy to all-black, grades 1-12, Central Consolidated School in Hickory. We were free to sit in any open seat on the bus for our 30-mile daily round trip to Hickory. Dr. Percy V. Williams was our principal and the first black person I knew to have a PhD.

Over the years as the NAACP successfully sued Harford County Schools in a series of cases, local administrators grudgingly began a glacial process of establishing criteria to permit some black children to attend all-white schools, as mandated by the Brown v. Board of Education decision of 1954. For reasons of safety my mother chose to forego the application process and keep her children at the segregated consolidated school. Even at an early age, I somehow felt disappointed.

In 1956, Edgewood Arsenal integrated its military housing, and my family moved to 129-F Hawthorne Drive. The move changed my world, as I found myself living with a racially mixed group

of kids my own age. The diversity of the neighborhood excited me. The new community, located very near Edgewood Elementary School, allowed my new white friends to walk the short distance to their classes.



*My mother Zelma on the lawn at 129-F Hawthorne Drive in Edgewood*

However, Harford County's obstinate views required that black children continue to make the trip to Hickory. At age nine I was developing a lingering sense of being denied something I wanted to experience. I had no idea that I was being bused to maintain racial segregation; nor, ironically, did I realize that black people were the subjects of widespread discrimination in other parts of the state.

Because my father and mother were from Baltimore City and Washington D.C. respectively, my family spent much of our free time in these more integrated urban settings. Back in Harford County, with the exception of the A&P in Bel Air, I was shielded from the worst