

of the spectrum, Miss Newman was my 12th grade bookkeeping teacher. She took me under her wing, and I earned an honest "A" in her class.

In the spring of 1965, the year of my graduation, the school principal discovered that I was to be conferred an academic diploma, not a business or general diploma. Vehemently opposed to my receiving the academic certificate, he challenged my teachers and critically reviewed my transcript. Fortunately, a number of teachers rose to my defense and verified my performance. They were led by Mr. Robert E. Lee Ross, my home-room teacher, my history teacher, and my favorite all-around faculty member. Although I was only a "C" student in his course and often had to be corrected for side-talking, I enjoyed his class and he seemed to have a fondness for me. I liked and admired Mr. Ross, gray hair, generally disheveled, baggy clothing and all.

At Bel Air I eventually made lots of friends and got along with nearly everyone. My parents helped in every way they could, but I found that good home training, personal prayer, and proper manners helped me a lot. During graduation week, unbeknownst to me, the Senior Class voted me the friendliest senior of the year. I was even featured in *The Bellarion*, the student newspaper, along with those classmates who won recognition in the various other categories.

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On Graduation Day, I was conferred an academic diploma. Along with a good number of other students, I may have had a "Gentleman's C" average, but I had met the school and state requirements. Justice had been served.

In my later years, I asked myself many times if I had contributed to the civil rights movement of the 1960's, even if in some small way. My experiences at BAHS always lead to the answer "YES!" Volunteering to promote school integration and graduating as the lone black student in a class of 460 pupils was, I believe, quite an achievement. I truly feel that I was one of Harford County's younger pioneers. I had helped advance the cause of integration in an environment administratively hostile for over a decade to the Supreme Court's mandate to end segregation and build a truly integrated system. Because of my effort -- and those of others like me -- many local residents came to benefit from integrated education far sooner than they might have otherwise.

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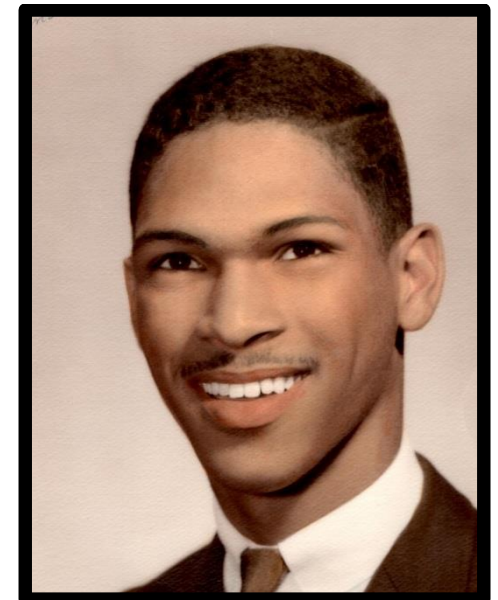
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Maurice W. Dorsey
Born to be a Trailblazer
Part 2 of 2

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Bringing Communities
Together Through
Sharing History



Cover: Maurice W. Dorsey, senior year, Bel Air High School (1965)

Maurice Dorsey's personal story from last week continues:

My Bel Air High School (BAHS) Years

When I departed Central Consolidated School in 1963, no one wished me "fare thee well," and in the fall at BAHS, I received absolutely no welcome. I was truly on my own.

On the bus that very first morning of school, the white woman driver assigned me a seat in the back of the bus where the tire wheel obstructed the leg space. My neighbor, Clarence Hopkins, and I sat together, the only two black children on the bus from the Conowingo area. Our new schoolmates called us names and verbally bullied us all the way to Bel Air. Strangely enough, it was a physically handicapped redhead girl named Sandy who led the racial chants. This younger child seemed automatically to regard blacks as having a lower social/economic place in the larger world than in the world of disability she likely experienced.

Upon arrival at BAHS and being freed of the bus bullies, Clarence and I walked through the front doors and were immediately greeted by the principal, who said: "Now I want you boys to stay out of trouble." Even upon our first entrance, he seemed to assume we might be guilty of committing some heinous crime. Needless to say, our BAHS "welcome" that day was anything but hospitable.



Maurice Dorsey, third from right standing, with members of the BAHS Projectionist Club. (Picture cropped from 1964 yearbook)

Despite the Supreme Court's long established ruling requiring segregated and integrated schools to have equal facilities, I learned immediately that BAHS' amenities were vastly superior to those at Central. BAHS struck me immediately as having a country club atmosphere. Not so ironically, if one knows history, Bel Air's building, in fact, was a year older, having opened in the fall of 1949. Central Consolidated opened in September 1950.

The physical features and curriculum at Bel Air were first rate compared to what I had known at Hickory. The building possessed athletic fields and facilities galore, came equipped with a greenhouse, wood and metal shops. The courses of study included auto mechanics, advanced math, several foreign languages, and all the academic sciences. Language, Business, and Science labs came outfitted with personalized equipment for each student. The gym was huge, and I had never even seen most of the

sports gear the physical education department had available.

Textbooks were new, unlike the battered copies that the kids at Central used after they had been passed down from the white schools. Bel Air even had a parking lot for student cars that was larger than that for the faculty. At age 69, and retired, I cannot help but wonder how different my education and life could have been if Harford County schools had integrated when I entered first grade in 1954.

After those first few days on the bus and in class, I complained to my mother about the troubling racial taunts, and she firmly replied: "Listen, Maurice, your father and I let you make your own decision to attend that school. What you are living at the new school is real life, so just get used to it and don't come home complaining every day, unless you see blood." I never complained again. I toughened up and adjusted to the setting.

As at any school, there were teachers at BAHS I adjusted to very well, and some I did not. Most of the instructors were neutral, and simply went through the motions of doing their job, keeping quiet toward me. My French teacher benignly but inane informed me one day that the mother of one of my friends at Central was her housekeeper! With some of the faculty I felt very unwelcomed. Rather than have me in his class, my geometry instructor had me removed and sent to another math teacher. At the other end