

Summer Teacher Institute 2017, Tougaloo College

In Whose Shoes Am I Walking

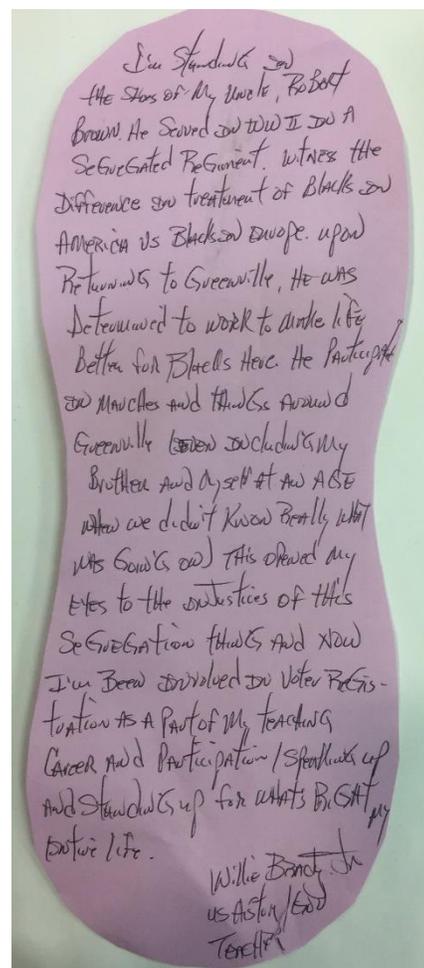
On the first morning of the teacher institute (July 10, 2017) teachers wrote stories about “in whose shoes am walking.” They wrote on colorful footprints that were then posted on the wall in a path for justice. Here are their stories. (Note that these are all first drafts and that the transcription is from the handwriting. Therefore there may be typos.)

I'm standing in the shoes of my uncle, Robert Brown. He served in WWII in a segregated regiment. Witness the difference in treatment of Blacks in America vs. Blacks in Europe. Upon returning to Greenville, he was determined to work to make life better for Blacks here. He participated in marches and things around Greenville, including my brother and myself. At our age, we didn't know really what was going on. This opened my eyes to the injustices of this segregation thing and how I've been involved in voter registration as a part of my teaching career and participation/speaking up and standing up for what's right in my professional life. — Willie Brady Jr.

I walk in the shoes of my father, Foch Dickens, who taught me the meaning of unconditional love and tolerance. His love of nature, all people, and through his many second chances for me compels me to carry on that love and acceptance into action through education. (Side note: when he told me as a child the n-word was a curse word). I walk in the shoes of my high school writing teacher, Mrs. Faith Howell, who set the love of learning on fire for me. I see the difference that love, through my father and Mrs. Howell, made in me. It is my passion to see to make that same difference in others. — Jessica Dickens

As a Black graduate of the University of Mississippi, I am walking in the footsteps of Mr. James Meredith. In 1962, Meredith made a bold move to enroll in the historically confederate drenched college campus that is Ole Miss. The audacity of this feat would not only change his future, but mine as well! — Brittany Connor

I am walking in the footsteps of my grandparents (Amson/Vera Walker) and uncles. My grandparents were activists in the 60s and because of that, 32 rounds were shot into my mom's childhood home. Also, my uncle was one of two Black students who integrated the local school district. He was bullied and abused almost every day until a group of students gathered together and escorted him daily on several occasions having to use force. — Andrea Burroughs



I walk in the shoes of the many nameless marchers who walked from Selma, who walked behind Dr. King, who walked down to the courthouse all across the South and marched into buildings to register to vote. The nameless walking school children who traveled dusty backroads to one room schools to get an education. The nameless worshippers who went to church everyday praying for a better day. The nameless soldiers who marched off to wars to fight for a country that didn't always fight for them. The fearless children who took to the streets in Birmingham and McComb. I walk in the shoes of Ruby Bridges, the Little Rock 9, James Meredith, Clyde Kennard, and the countless others who were first to go and tread a path for others to go. I am walking in the footsteps of my hero, Fannie Lou Hamer, because I refuse to be sick and tired of being sick and tired. I walk in the footsteps of Giants, not in size but in the sheer size of their determination and hope. — Alma McDonald

I'm walking in the footsteps of one of my first loves -- Juanita Johnson, who held me and rocked me and taught me to swing and recognize letters and words because she would let me sit on the countertop and pepper her with questions about what every little thing she picked up was. I'm the youngest of three girls, the baby, and she was my mother when my mother wasn't there. I loved her fiercely and I loved getting to stay at her house. It was there I first saw the framed pictures of Robert Kennedy, John Kennedy, and Martin Luther King framed over her couch. She told me these were heroes: men who stood for freedom, and I drank up these words. When I was older, and no longer had a need for a babysitter, my mother told me the story of a boycott in my tiny town of Wesson, Mississippi and that Mr. D. S., Miss Juanita's big muscly, sometimes intimidating husband was the leader. He worked for my daddy at his field mill and he visited my daddy one night before the boycott to tell him what was to come. I never thought until now about the fear Juanita must have had -- the fear of violence in Mississippi in the 60s and the powerful lessons and love she showed me. — Lynn Clark

I walk in the footsteps of Judith Ann Stevenson Luinbo, my beautiful grandmother who a true mountain woman who stood 5 foot nothing. She taught the power of planting and nurturing and left me a legacy of loving everyone. I am daunted by the idea of filling her shoes because no one ever could - those soles are huge but they left a clear path. It is in those footsteps that I stood for love in all its forms and I spoke my own truth when I declared my love for another woman - Megan, my wife. It is in those footsteps that I have sought knowledge and understanding. Where I've learned to speak up. To hush. To listen. — MJ

I walk in the footsteps of my white ancestors ... sharecropper farmers who complicitly lived their life in the segregated South. They were good people... but nonetheless cogs in a wheel. Sheila Skemp taught me the power of history and individuals bringing change - I teach my students to embrace this. — Laura B.

My big mama, Annie Lee Jones, left big shoes to fill. She was a sugar cane chopping, cotton ball picking, white folk house cleaning, moonshine running single parent. Big mama sewed quilts, baked buttermilk pound cakes, and collected Jet magazines where Emmett Till's mulatto face stared back at 8 yr. Old me from the cover. Big Mama didn't graduate from high school, but my mama did. My mama, Vera Bell Willis, didn't graduate from college, but I did. I walk in Big Mama's shoes, my mama's shoes, and I'm still walking... walking to leave footprints for my A and my M. — Tracei Willis

I am walking in the shoes of my deceased mother, Betty Sue Walker; my aunt Johnnie Sue Johnson; my great uncle Lewis T. Slater; and countless others (all of Corinth, MS). They attended segregated schools. Scate Street Elementary and Eason High School in my hometown of the 1950's and 1960's. I walk in their history that later became a part of my own, when I attended my own segregated prom in 1993 and was told in 2001 that I wasn't qualified to teach in my former high school because the superintendent of that time didn't want a Black English teacher working in the district. Now I'm 18 years in... won't he do it? — Gennelle Graham, class of '93; Corinth High School English teacher, Teacher of the Year 2017

I walk in the footsteps of strong women who came before me. Beverly Champion Lott, my mother and a quiet voice for justice who treated all with kindness and dignity. She reached across racial lines to work with others to make school better for all children. She was my first example of stepping out of the white bubble of rural MS to include everyone. Her actions were not grand or dangerous, but they were a pebble in the pond for me, creating larger ripples in me and my daughters. Juanita Richardson Wolfe, my strong and loving grandmother whose Christian life of acceptance and humility is an example for an entire town. She raised five children as a widow on her own, then raised six grandchildren. She worked circles around us in her 80s. Now, in her failing health, she is still an example of how to love without strings attached. — Lynne Schneider

I'm walking in the shoes of my father, Pedro Marquez. No, not an educator, not a Mississippian, not even an American. But an immigrant. A man who came to America, worked hard to create a better opportunity for himself and his family. A man who taught me the importance of hard work and education. A man who taught me that I am no better than anyone else but no less either. A man who taught me to think for myself, make my own opinions, respect myself, and respect others. — Christian Davidson

Coming from one of the poorest counties in the state of Ms. Helen Jean Carthan-Ingram was a 16 year old 10th grade student at the only Black high school in Marks, MS walked out after civil rights activist Collie Bolden was arrested for talking to students about the poor people's campaign and civil rights. She was beaten by law enforcement. She became an educator for 28 years and politician for 16 years. She was the first Black female alderman. She instilled in us to fight for justice and equality. Also my cousin Emmett Till. — Cavotta Ingram-Ryan

I wish I could write their names - all of their names - on this footprint. But it's been 14 years, and some remain burned in my memory and are still active part of my life and others' names have slowly shifted out, like fading colors on an old but loved blanket. I walk here with Amber, Tyrone, Charity, Joshua, Jaquique, Sophia, Jaelon, Sarah, Deborah, Deboráh. With Zachary and Hope and Elliott and Stephen, and those precious seniors my first year in Belzoni when I didn't know what I was doing. I come following the footsteps of my mother and grandmother, both teachers. But my students drive my JOURNEY! — Sarah Ballard

I walk in the shoes of two women: my mother, Mave Louise Richardson and Ms. Ella Baker. My mother had an 8th grade education, played a mean jazz piano, read everything, and was in the world. She also gave me love and an amazing degree of independence. She is with me still. I hesitate to say that I walk in the shoes of Ms. Baker because she was a woman of uncommon intelligence, wisdom, and commitment to grassroots organizing. However, I watched her move and impact SNCC's thinking and direction and how she related to all kinds of folks and I learned from her... as did everyone who came in contact with her. As Bernice Johnson Reagon said, "I learned through the move that there was another way to be in this world." — Judy Richardson

I am walking in the shoes of all African Americans' shoes. Burgland High School Walkout. In 1961, more than 100 students walked out of BHS to protest the expulsion of Brenda Travis and other local injustices. When they knelt in prayer at City Hall they were arrested. Many of the students refused to sign a mandatory pledge that they would not participate in civil rights activity and faced expulsion from the segregated BHS. This was the first mass student-led movement in the state of Mississippi. I am walking in the shoes of Raykesha Carter who was removed from a class for asking a question. — Falana McDaniel