

THROUGH IT ALL

By Lurlene Adams

Contrary to the stereotype, I grew up in the '50's and '60's in a two parent household. My dad, Johnnie, worked two jobs for many years after serving in the Air Corp to support his homemaker, Lurlene, and his three daughters. I attended a segregated parochial school, Holy Redeemer, from pre-K through eighth grade, so I was spared racism during the school day. However, I encountered my fair share of it outside of school.

During one of my regular grocery shopping trips with my maternal grandfather to Lovelace Super Market on Rigsby Ave., we kept passing by a white lady with her toddler in the shopping cart. The baby kept smiling at me and giggling with me, so I eventually waved at the baby, and he waved back. The mother looked at me with a scowl and told her toddler, "**Don't play with that nigger!**" Even though I was about six years old, those words stung me so badly that I couldn't even tell my grandfather what had been said to me. However, the minute I got home, I asked my mother what a nigger was. Even though I had never heard the word before, I knew it wasn't anything good. My mother took me in her arms, wiped away my tears, and assured me that I wasn't one.



San Antonio Light, August 11, 1958



Photo: UTSA Special Collections 1949



Photo: Terrazzo entrance of Thom McAn on E. Houston St.

I do recall riding on the back of the bus, waiting what seemed like hours to get fitted for Easter shoes in Baker's and Thom McAnn shoe stores on E. Houston St. until all the white customers were waited on. I never understood how my mama could wait so patiently while white customers went ahead of us. But I guess she was willing to do whatever it took to have her girls properly outfitted for the holiday. As I got older, I would halt the shoe salesman for her, but I, too, was told to wait.

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When I was old enough to go to the Majestic Theater to see a movie with my teenaged cousin on Saturdays, I felt it was a valued rite of passage. I didn't even notice that our entrance and ticket booth was in the alley and that our seats were in the balcony. It startled me once when I heard laughter during a comedy movie, and I asked my cousin, Clarence, "Where is that noise coming from?" He led me to the front of the balcony and showed me the sea of white patrons on the first floor of the theater. When I asked him, "Why are they down there and we're up here?" He said shamefully, "Because they're white, and we're not allowed to sit with them." I could tell he felt bad for himself and for me. Going to the Majestic Theater for a movie was never a treat again.

The ultimate racial insult to me was when my high school counselor, Mr. Norrell, after receiving my SAT scores, advised me that I would never receive a four year college degree to attain my dream of being a teacher. Even though throughout my high school years, I was a member of Sigma Epsilon and National Honor Society, Mr. Norrell said, "Maybe, maybe, you can get a two year college degree. But you will never ever get a four year college degree that you need to be a teacher." How those words devastated me! When I told my dad what my white counselor had said, my dad said, "Don't you ever let anybody tell you what you can't do!"



My dad was right because I became a high school English teacher at the age of 21 after earning my BA, attained my Masters degree in Education, and was a teacher of teachers across the state of Texas during my career.

If I had listened to the negative racist noise that was directed at me in San Antonio, Texas, I probably wouldn't be the proud mother of a daughter, Brandi, who has a MA with principal certification and works at a university; a son, Homer III, who has a PhD and is a cancer scientist, nor would I be a teacher retiree.

Racism doesn't define us; we define ourselves! TO GOD BE THE GLORY!

San Antonio African American Community Archive & Museum

210.724.3350

admin@saaacam.org

2014 S. Hackberry St, San Antonio TX 78210-1541

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I'm a native of the Eastside of San Antonio. Even though I've been a member of Antioch Baptist Church since age six, I attended Catholic schools through ninth grade. I graduated from Highlands High School in 1968, from San Antonio College in 1970 (AA), from Our Lake of the Lake (BA) in 1972, and from UTSA (MA) in 1991. I was married to my high school sweetheart, Homer Adams Jr. for 22 years, and to this union two children were born: Brandi J. and Homer III. I am also the proud grandmother of four granddaughters. After teaching for 30 years in NISD and SAISD, I served as a Director of Education at Sylvan Learning Center for 13 years. I am currently enjoying my retirement as a Friend of SAAACAM, where I serve on the Education Committee.

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