

I VOTE TO TRY TO MAKE SURE WE CAN STILL COME TO TOWN

by Sallie Frederick

As I prepare to vote for a president, as with each election, my mind takes me back to my childhood memories. We lived in a rural area outside of a small Texas town. My dad was James Edwards and my mother was Ruby Youngblood Edwards. I can see my father sitting at the kitchen table across from my mother as they discussed the candidates and issues for upcoming elections.



Even as a child, I understood that their conversation was unique and different from what I thought the average discussion about who to vote for should be. My Daddy was illiterate. He was orphaned at age nine and was passed from relative to relative. They gave him food and shelter, but no one made sure he went to school consistently. Though he could not read and write he could picture the words in his mind. As a result, during my parents' conversation each evening, not only did they discuss the merits of the candidates, but my mother also taught my father how to identify their names on the ballot. Mama would print the names on a paper and Daddy would draw lines around them so he could see the shapes the words made when all the letters were in place.

My father was a carpenter, and he was skilled at drawing plans for buildings, so he had to see the words as structures to remember them. Mom would review the numbers on the proposals, and they would talk about which one was to be "yes" and which would be "no." They did this each evening after dinner for Daddy wanted to be sure that when he went into the ballot box alone, he would be able to vote for the candidates of his choice and the correct issues. In addition to studying the names and proposal numbers, Daddy would ask Mama if she had been putting money away for the poll taxes. After time, they would talk about paying the poll taxes.

During those conversations, my seven siblings and I knew we needed to play quietly so that Daddy could concentrate. Each evening, when my parents finished, Daddy would talk to us about how difficult it was for him to vote. He would explain that though it was a challenge, he did it because it was important.

ORIGINAL

POLL TAX RECEIPT
 STATE OF TEXAS
 COUNTY OF BEXAR No. 45073
 San Antonio, Texas, 1931

PRECINCT 11 PAGE _____
 LINE _____

RECEIVED OF Mrs. Carrie Turk
 1931 the sum of One and 50/100 Dollars in payment of Poll Tax for the year 1931
 ADDRESS 2154 First City Bldg.

AGE	LENGTH OF RESIDENCE			Native Born	Citizen of United States and
40	State	County	City	Naturalized	was born in
20		20	20		Kans.

Occupation *Housewife* Where Issued *Chgo.*
 Race - White - Colored Sex - Male - Female

The said Tax Payer being duly sworn by me says that the above is correct. All of which I Certify.
 By *E. F. Moran* Deputy Tax Collector, Bexar County, Texas. *Mary M. Averett*

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Daddy also stressed that when we were old enough to vote, we should always vote. He explained that we needed to be able to read and write so we would understand what we were voting about and who we were voting for. Before leaving the table he would always say, **"This is very important because if you don't know the issues and you don't vote, white people can vote that negroes can't come to town, and you will be stuck in the country."**



Each time I go the polls, I smile and remember those evening in the kitchen. When I step up to the ballot box, I close my eyes for a second and I can see my parents sitting at the table. I take a deep breath and I begin. I carefully read the ballot, I mark my selections, review them, and submit my vote. Then I thank God for my opportunity to vote and for my parents (may they rest in peace), the two wisest people I have known. After I walk out the door, I always say aloud with a chuckle, **"Daddy, I'm trying to make sure we can still come to town."**

