

The second encounter as told by Yvonne Vance.

In November 1980, I was asked to open a new bank branch in Water Valley for my employer, the Sunburst Bank located in Grenada. Soon after making the decision to locate in Water Valley, we hired a realtor to find a good location for the branch. Hershel Howell was the realtor and we had already purchased a lot on Central Street, which had a small building that, with minor repairs, could serve as a temporary bank until we were able to make plans for the new and larger building.

Naturally, I was anxious to begin building my staff. As we already had prominent people in Water Valley who had been instrumental in our getting approval from the state banking board, we leaned on them for help and advice in local matters as well, especially in the hiring of the best employees. One day in late November Cecil (Buddy) Walley, a well-known local pharmacist, told me that he had a lady by the name of Ora Lee Phillips who wanted to apply for a banking position. I called Ora Lee and we agreed to meet at a home that I had bought in Water Valley, which was undergoing renovation. After she arrived, we looked for a place to sit and interview. As it happened, carpenters and painters were all over the house making all kinds of noise. The only quiet place was the upstairs bathroom. So, the bathroom became our interview office. As you can guess, there are only three items permanently located in a bathroom and the sink is too high to sit on, so the other two items became our interview chairs (And we still laugh about it to this day!).

I was very impressed with Ora Lee and immediately made her a job offer. She accepted and quickly learned a lot about banking including how to run the proof machine and how to run a teller window. After proof machines were no longer needed, Ora Lee became a full time Teller. Being the friendly and helpful lady that she is, and knowing everyone in Yalobusha County, Ora Lee became one of our most valuable employees. She was a friend to everyone who walked through the door and was well respected by all the customers and employees alike.

While I eventually went to Oxford in 1987 to start another new branch, Ora Lee worked for several more years at the Water Valley bank. I will always treasure my time there and will always consider Ora as my friend. (And the original interview site will never be forgotten).

Ora Lee started working at the Sunburst Bank, now known as Regions Bank, in 1981 and explained how that job led her to another endeavor. "I was often approached by customers about their need for daycare," she said. "After much thought, prayer, and encouragement from my children, I started looking into the possibility of opening a daycare facility. I had a long talk with Wayne Harris, the president of the bank at that time. He was very helpful and supportive. I found a potential location, applied for and received the loan from the bank and the rest is history."

On January 3, 1991, Ora and her daughter Kathleen opened Rainbow Kiddy World Daycare. She continued to work at the bank while her daughter operated the daycare. Ora spent many afternoons after leaving the bank and most of her weekends at the daycare making sure things were ready for her babies each day. She reluctantly made the decision to retire from the bank in 2005 after twenty-four years to help her daughter run Rainbow

Kiddy World. Through those years they provided services for hundreds of children and low-income working parents. Kathleen made the decision to close Rainbow World later in 2005 so she could become a full-time servant of God in her church and the community.

Ora Lee is a lifelong active member of Bayson Chapel M. B. Church, where Reverend Amos Sims is the pastor. She has served faithfully in numerous capacities including Sunday school and bible study attendee, former choir member, and former director of the Youth Department for many years. Currently she serves as a member of the program committee, director of the Mother's Board, organizer of the Bayson Chapel Prayer Ministry, and wherever else she is called upon to serve. In the community Ora Lee served on the Water Valley Chamber of Commerce, Yalobusha County American Cancer Society, as an active poll worker for the Sylvia Rena community where she lives, and as a board member of the Yalobusha County Dining With Diabetes.

That driver's license she obtained so many years ago has proven to be invaluable. Ora Lee now drives many senior citizens to their doctor appointments and/or other errands whenever needed.

In 2013 Ora and Raymond were honored to serve as grand marshals for the Water Valley Christmas Parade. My sister has been a great role model for me, my other siblings and cousins. We cherish her advice and wisdom and for being that guiding light. For the love, laughter and good times there is no comparison.

My Closing Thoughts

Role models like Ora Lee Polk Phillips are so needed today. She is a great example of what can be accomplished in life through perseverance and kindness. With a high school diploma and a year of college she has accomplished more than some with advanced degrees. She has used the skills that her parents taught her, the knowledge her teachers gave her and the tools she acquired in her career to be successful in her life journey. Nurturing is the word that comes to my mind when I envision her face. We have talked about what she has done at work and in the community and for others. Lest we forget, while she forged her career, she was also a wife raising eight children - no easy task.

Being the youngest in my family and having to tag along with my mother and sisters throughout the community when I grew up, I acquired a lot of big sisters who encouraged me and set high expectations through their examples. I can still rely on them now. They are the catalysts for the work that has gone into this project, how it has become a vehicle to document the stories and achievements of black women and to preserve the oral histories of black families. I am privileged to be able to write about them, name them in this column and even the unnamed know who they are. Ora Lee Phillips means home to me - meaning that I can call her and other women in Yalobusha County and get what I need. I know that I can go to the black churches and see someone who will welcome me because I am a child of that community and they will know my name. I am glad Ora Lee Phillips knows my name.

University of Mississippi Announces Spring Honor Lists

OXFORD - The University of Mississippi recently announced students named to the Spring 2020 Honor Roll lists, including Chancellor's Honor Roll.

The following students from Yalobusha County were named to the Chancellor's Honor Roll:

Marley Jessica Brewer and Madison Leeann Brewer, both of Coffeeville; Nikyra Jenkins and Caitlin Breanna White, both of Oakland; Kristie Ginger Hartley of Tillatoba; and Sheree Denise Anderson, Allyson Taylor Avant, Annabelle Grace Botts, Rebecca Ann Bowling, Mariah Keisha Daniels, Patrick Conner Ferguson, Luke Thomas Holder, Greta Rose Koshenina, Maximillian Alexander Rangel, Anthony Jahmal Rogers, Addison Eloit Roush, Keelan Jerrell Swearingen, Sakia Townsend and Carlye Laine Washington, all of Water Valley.

"Our Chancellor's Honor Roll students set the bar for academic excellence at the University of Mississippi, and I congratulate them on their outstanding achievement," said Chancellor Glenn F. Boyce. "Their success is the result of an incredible amount of hard work and dedication and truly showcases their commitment to the pursuit of academic and personal greatness."

In order to be eligible for honor roll designation, a student must have completed at least 12 graded hours for the semester and may not be on academic probation during the semester.

The following students from Yalobusha County were named to the Dean's List:

Tyjanique Tyonna Reed and Ja'lahya Umayah Stokes, both of Coffeeville; Cearra Renee Moore Oakland; and Langston Ables, Anna Katherine Burress, Noah Franks, Thomas J. Mackenzie Gordon, Carson Danielle Hervey, Jackson Lester Ward, Madelyn Kate Welch, Jennifer Dawn Westmoreland and Emmarina C. Wilks, all of Water Valley.

The University of Mississippi, affectionately known as Ole Miss, is the state's flagship university. Included in the elite group of R1: Doctoral Universities - Highest Research Activity by the Carnegie Classification, it has a long history of producing leaders in public service, academics and business.

With more than 23,000 students, Ole Miss is the state's largest university. Its 16 academic divisions include a major medical school, nationally recognized schools of accountancy, law and pharmacy, and an Honors College acclaimed for a blend of academic rigor, experiential learning and opportunities for community action.



Salutarian Blayne Clark (above) and Historian Grant Burress were surprised at home last Wednesday as Water Valley High School Principal Drew Pitcock and counselor Jonathan Barnes presented plaques for their achievements.



of the Water Valley football and baseball teams for six years. He was a member of the 2018 3-A State Championship team where he was chosen as the C-Spire Scholar Athlete of the game. During his football career he was selected as All Region 2-3A First team Linebacker, All Region 2-3A Super 22 Linebacker, WCBI All-End Zone Linebacker, 3A All State Honorable Mention, Oxford Eagle All Area Linebacker, Lifetime Football Captain, and chosen to play in the NEMFCA All Star Classic Football game. In baseball, Grant was chosen as All Region 2-3A utility player.

Grant is the son of Steve and Kellie Burress. He

would like to thank his past teachers, coaches and the administration for their support and encouragement during his educational career. In the fall he will attend the University of Mississippi, where he was accepted into the Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honor College. He will pursue a degree in Biology and plans to attend medical school.

All three top grads are members of the Water Valley First Baptist Church. A full report on their accomplishments will be included in the Herald's graduate section that will be published in the June 18 edition. An annual tradition, the section will feature all 65 graduates in the class.



Water Valley High School Principal Drew Pitcock (right) and counselor Jonathan Barnes (center) recognized Coulter Clement as the valedictorian of the Class of 2020. It wasn't a traditional recognition, as they surprised Clement at his home last Wednesday, but nothing about the school year has been traditional following the school closure in March due to a global pandemic. Pitcock noted that the entire class has shown strong resiliency as their final school year abruptly changed.

Top Grads

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try and Track teams and is the reigning 3A Cross Country State Champion. He was also named to the 2019 Clarion Ledger Cross Country All-State team. Clement was also named to the 3A Cross Country All-State team during his sophomore, junior and senior seasons. During the 2019 track season, he was the state runner-up in the 3200-meter run. Clement has also held numerous district

titles in the 800, 1600 and 3200 meter runs throughout his track career. He is also a 4.0 scholar athlete.

Clement will attend Mississippi College in Clinton where he accepted an Honors College Scholarship and Music Scholarship. He will pursue a music/worship leadership degree.

Clement shared that he is honored to represent WVHS as the 2020 valedictorian.

"I am thankful for each and every person who has helped shape and support

me throughout this journey. I would not be where I am today without the constant encouragement and guidance that I have received from so many," Clement shared.

Salutarian

Blayne Clark began attendance in the Water Valley School District in 2014 and was recently inducted into the WVHS Hall of fame. He has participated in the Blue Devil athletic program in football, basketball and baseball.

Historian

Grant Burress attended Water Valley School District throughout his educational career. He was on the Principal's Honor Roll and was inducted into the Water Valley High School Hall of Fame.

Burress was a member