

Percy Haywood, Jr.

And The Haywood Men Of Distinction

If you are a regular reader of this column, which started in 2018 and focused on outstanding black women of Yalobusha County, you will know that a few articles featured black men. One profiled Mr. Ezra Davidson, the first principal for the black schools, which later came to bear his name. The daughters of Mr. John Herod and Mr. George Russell, high school principals in Water Valley and Coffeeville, respectfully, wrote about their fathers. We are working on an article about Mr. Jimmy Walker, the principal for the black schools in Oakland, MS, and are seeking to feature Mr. John Dowsing, Mr. Joseph Ford and Mr. Roosevelt Hervey, all three outstanding educational administrators in Yalobusha County. As the principal for Davidson Elementary school, Mr. Hervey was known for picking children up for school in a wagon.

The educators deserve our attention and appreciation, and quite a few were my favorites when I was in school. Mr. Percy Haywood, Jr. a social studies teacher, now retired, stands out. He made social studies interesting enough to keep us awake in what was sometimes the last period of the day. His best tool was his quirky sense of humor and corny jokes. You really did not want him to laugh at you – you wanted to laugh with him.

Mr. Haywood inspired us to expand our environment,

Growing Up In Water Valley

By Percy Haywood, Jr.

I was born in Water Valley, Mississippi on July 10, 1941, to Percy and Luvenia Haywood. I was the third son of seven sons. I was reared in Yalobusha County on the McFarland farm, which was a multi-family farm consisting of the Buford, Toliver, Jenkins, Murray, Wilbur Morgan, and Haywood families. In many aspects, we were one big family, looking out for the welfare of each other. This was common among many black families during this period of my life.

We also shared several similarities, notably attending the Pine Spring Baptist Church and the Pine Spring Community School. The construction of the Enid Reservoir changed everything. It consumed much of the fertile soil – considered some of the most productive in the county – that produced the crops for these families. We all dispersed as the reservoir was created.

The Haywood family moved to the east side of Water Valley. I attended Oak Grove Community School for one year and completed elementary school at Davidson Elementary located on Cemetery Street. I finished high school at Davidson High School in 1960, located on the hill of Calhoun Street. Only two students from the class of 1960 went on to college, Willie C. Johnson and me.

I graduated from Mississippi Vocational College in Itta Bena, Mississippi in 1964 with a BS degree in Social Sciences and did my student teaching at Davidson High School with a contract to become a permanent teacher after I completed student teaching. This was a unique situation because usually one was not allowed to do student teaching in his/her home school. In 1974, I received my master's degree from the University of Mississippi, and for thirty-two years, I taught History, Economics, and Government at Davidson High School and Water Valley High School until my retirement in 1997. Many of my former students and three of my brothers, whom I taught, told me that I was a motivator and mentor to them. I felt honored and blessed that they esteemed me in this manner.

While teaching, I was involved in the E. C. Davidson Scholarship and President of the Community Involvement Group. This organization administered the E. C. Davidson Scholarship.

On July 1, 1970, Davidson High School consolidated with Water Valley High School after the Alexander vs. Holmes County Board of Education lawsuit. This was a United States Supreme Court case where the Court ordered immediate desegregation of public schools in the American South.

I was ordained a deacon at the Pleasant Green Baptist Church in 1972 and became a Sunday school teacher in 1975. I was a tax preparer in the community for thirty-five years. Farming was a second occupation for me, which included raising cattle, growing and selling timber. I also served twenty-five years as a director of the Yalobusha County Hospital and Nursing Home Board of Directors.

This community has given so much to me; it is an honor to give something back. I thank the Water Valley Community for its trust in me. This community will always have a special place in my heart. May God continue to bless this community.



Percy Haywood, Jr.



Percy Haywood, Sr. and Luvenia Haywood



Luvenia Haywood (center) is pictured with her seven sons (from left) Lewis Haywood, Percy Haywood, Jr., James Haywood, Russell Haywood, Verdia Haywood, Ernest Haywood and Joe Haywood.

see and understand the world beyond Water Valley and Yalobusha County. He instilled in us a desire to learn because he knew how inadequate education was in Mississippi at the time, particularly for blacks. He taught us the art of debate by defending even our wrong answers. If you were slow to answer a question, he would sing out, "I can't hear you!" He taught us about blackness, about what "Say it loud, I am black and proud," really meant during 1968 and 1969 – what I believe were our most volatile years. The all-black schools were set to close. We would be the last class to graduate from Davidson High School in 1970 – the

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A Brother, A Teacher, A Mentor

By James Hubert Haywood

Percy Haywood Jr. was the first of the seven brothers to attend college. I was a student at Davidson High School when he began teaching in 1964. He was my Economic and American Government teacher. This was a unique situation because he was my brother and my teacher.

At home, we all called my brother Sam. At school he was Mr. Haywood. He never showed partiality toward me or my brothers. In other words, we had no advantage being his siblings and living in the same household with him. We knew the kind of person he was, and we never expected to be given special treatment. From the minute he began teaching, I knew Percy had something special. I knew he was not just an ordinary teacher. He knew how to make learning interesting and fun at the same time. He was always prepared and knew exactly how he was going to present his lesson plans. He loved what he was doing and took each student at heart.

Percy was an inspiration to me and the other brothers he taught. We followed in his footsteps and went on to get college degrees as so many others have done because of the impact he had on their lives. Many of his students, even to this day, still recall and cherish the moments they spent with him in the classroom. They still talk about what a great teacher and person Mr. Haywood was, and what he instilled in them that made them a better person. I have never heard any of his students say anything negative about him nor anyone in this community either.

Percy not only was a great and gifted teacher; he was a great Sunday School teacher and a great deacon at Pleasant Green Baptist Church for many years. He worked very hard to make the community and Water Valley a better place to live and raise families. Percy was always available to help in any way he could. He is still a humble man and a man of great wisdom and knowledge, always looking for opportunities to help someone have a better life.

We, as a family, relied on these attributes in so many ways. He was my personal consultant when I needed to make an important decision, and I would always talk with him before making that decision.

He worked with the Community Involvement Group which administers The E. C. Davidson Scholarship to provide stipends to high school graduates attending college. His work as a tax preparer inspired many others in the community to learn how to prepare their taxes from observing him. Joyce Judson is one example. "He is responsible for my doing taxes. He told us in my high school class that we needed to learn how to do taxes and I started right then and been doing taxes ever since, 56 years," said Joyce. She started Joyce's Tax Service in May, 1967.

Percy is a godly man who always wants to see others succeed. His godly spirit is manifested in every aspect of his life. He has helped shape the lives of so many young people in this community, and I can say that I am one of them. I am thankful I have him for a brother, teacher and mentor.



By Dottie Chapman Reed

Reed is a native of Water Valley and graduated from Davidson High School in 1970. She published a series of articles in the North Mississippi Herald from August, 2018, through July, 2020, sharing the stories of unsung black women who made or are making a difference in Yalobusha County. This is part two of the project which features black men. Reed can be reached at (678) 825-2356 or reed2318@bellsouth.net

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end of an era.

Mr. Haywood called us by our last names. I now realize that as high school juniors and seniors, he treated us like college freshmen trying to prepare us for college and the real world. I pray he knows how much his students appreciated his work. It certainly helped me when I faced the ire and racism of my white college classmates and professors at the University of Mississippi and when I decided to wear an afro in my freshman year.

An April 11, 2019 column, "Twenty-three Strong Chartering Members – Courtesy Titles Please," noted that Percy Haywood, Jr. served as the first president of the Water Valley NAACP Branch in 1970 – evidence to all of his love and support of Water Valley and surrounding communities. Even after he retired in 1997, friends often sought his guidance and advice on social, economic and political issues. In 2018 Mr. Haywood's brother, James, recorded a short essay for him about his growing up in Water Valley. It is included here.

To further understand what made Percy Haywood, Jr. an outstanding black man, I have asked his brothers to share not only about Percy Jr., but also to tell us about Percy Haywood, Sr. and the accomplishments of a family of outstanding black men of Yalobusha County. Readers will note the common themes of commitment to family and community, love and respect.

I must admit that until now I was not aware of the three older brothers, (Lewis Prentiss 1937-1996, Joe Fred 1938-2018, and Ernest Edward 1943-2000). Mr. Percy and Mrs. Luvenia Haywood had seven sons, which might remind one of the biblical significances of the number 7. It often symbolizes completion or perfection. You will see that the couple taught their seven sons to stay on task and to complete whatever they started with perfection. Perhaps it felt quite fitting to name their fourth son Percy Haywood, Jr.



Brothers (front row, from left) Russell Haywood, Percy Haywood, Jr.; (back row, from left) Verdia Haywood and James Haywood standing on the steps of their home place.

Percy Haywood, Jr.

Motivator, Encourager, An Example

By Russell Lee Haywood

The three things that come to mind when I think of Percy, Jr. are: Motivator, Encourager, an Example to follow. He showed me that there is something better in life than working a manual labor job and that you can use your head and mind to acquire knowledge and skills needed to be successful in life. He believes that when you acquire that knowledge and success you should not hold on to it for your use but pass it on and help someone else be a better person so that the community can be a better community.

Over the years, Percy has been an excellent example for young black men in the Water Valley area. He encourages them to stay in school, study, and have a plan for their life. When Percy finished at Mississippi Valley State University and came back to Water Valley to teach, this provided encouragement to me and other young people that "Yes You Can." It has stayed with me through the years. He treated everyone fairly and did the right thing toward everyone, inside and outside of the classroom and in the community. This is what he and all of us got from our father, Percy Haywood Sr. – "Do the right thing."

When Percy was teaching at Davidson High School, three of us brothers were in his classes. As my other brothers note, he did not treat us any differently than the other students. In other words, he did not give us a break simply because we were family. He was appointed and served on the Yalobusha Hospital Board because he cared about people and worked hard to meet the needs of people.

When Percy began teaching, more students started to attend college to further their education. When I graduated, nine students from my class went to college including myself. The role model that "home boy" Percy Haywood gave us contributed to this progress. Percy retired from the school system when our mother's health declined so that he had more time to oversee her care. This came from dad impressing on us to "Take Care of Your Mother." Speaking of my dad.....
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