

Lessons From My Father – William Tedford

During the Juneteenth celebration in downtown Atlanta, I had the opportunity to present my book on a live stage in Centennial Park representing the local chapter of ASALH (Association for the Study of African American Life and History). After my talk, the young woman who was in charge came up to me and said, "You won't believe this, but my father was born in Water Valley." And she was right. I could not believe it. Again, another connection, which continues to happen, and I was glad that I went ahead with my presentation despite the escalated parking price and the 100-plus temperature. Sandra Tedford also mentioned her grandmother owning a business in Mississippi in the 1930s. We were not able to finish our conversation until we spoke by phone from Sandra's home in Chicago. I could hear nothing but love and pride as she described her father, William Tedford, his love for his family, his high school classmates and friends, his work and his Mississippi rearing.

Toward the end of our conversation, I finally made the Water Valley connection, when she mentioned her cousin Rickey Tedford. My mistake was thinking that Rickey's last name was Telford and I apologize for that error. Rickey's father Henry was William Tedford's brother, named

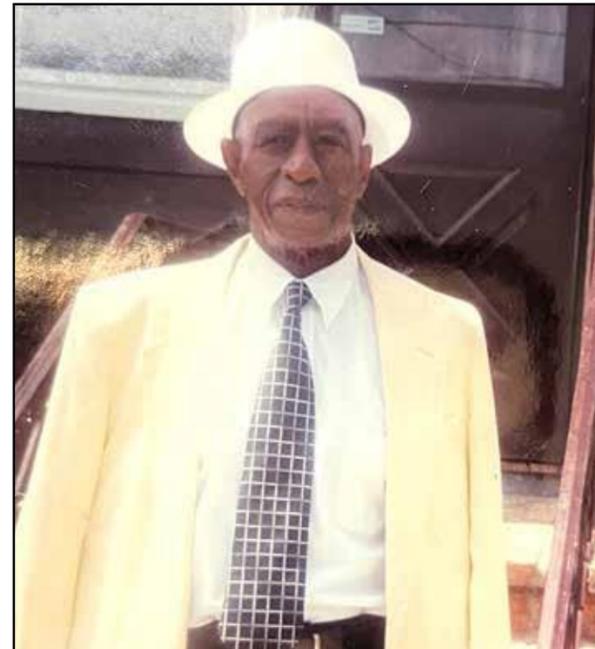


By Dottie
Chapman Reed

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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 that features black men. Reed can be reached at (678) 825-2356 or reed2318@bellsouth.net

for their father. An April 25, 2019 article in this newspaper and in my book features Rickey's grandmother, Mrs. Cora Lee Folson. The piece was written by Dorothy Caulfield Wiman, whom Mrs. Folson cared for as a baby. Now here we are a little more than 3 years later discovering and learning about this Tedford connection and about another outstanding man of Yalobusha County who served this country in the Korean War. I garnered respect and appreciation for him through the words of his daughter, Sandra. Now you, too, can learn more from her.



Water Valley Native William Tedford



Attendees at a Grenada Colored High School Class reunion included (left to right) Mary Booker, Guest, William D. Tedford, (standing in front of William D. Tedford) Blanche Herman, (standing to left of

William D. Tedford) Betty Jean McCain, L.C. Goin, Dolly McCaleb, William Weathers, Jean Watts, Guest; and (front row, left to right) (kneeling is) Lonnie Reed, (seated) Eddie Jr. Robinson and Ella Polk.

By Sandra Tedford
When I was growing up, my father would often speak about his childhood in Mississippi and he shared many fond memories of Water Valley and his friends from nearby Grenada, I have my own memories of Mississippi that were developed at an early age. I remember when I was five years old my parents along with my brother Victor headed south to visit family in Mississippi. To this day, I still recall the smell of my dad's new Buick. The taste of turnip and mustard greens, corn bread, and candied yams is very much etched in my memory.

My dad, William D. Tedford, was born August 16th, 1932, in Water Valley to Bessie Lee and Henry Tedford, one of five siblings – three brothers and two sisters. As a young man, he'd often accompany his grandfather Bruce Monday, a mortician, on some of his assignments to pick up the remains of dead persons. My dad would recount how he would pick up the bodies of the deceased with little hesitation. One time I asked him, "Weren't you afraid to pick up a dead body?" He said, "No! I was with my grandfather." He would describe some of the most brutal ways people died; some on the train tracks and others in more graphic ways that I really don't like to recount.

He also worked closely with his grandmother, Mary Monday, by serving customers in Mary Monday's Café in Grenada. My

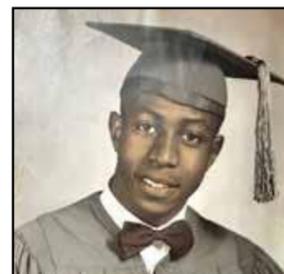
great grandmother, Mary Monday, was a pioneering black woman who had the gumption to start her own café and serve up meals she prepared with her own hands. She was amazing! He recounted numerous stories of all the great jazz musicians he met while working in the café when they stopped to eat at Mary Monday's. The Café was close to the train stop. So, it was a convenient location for black people to get something to eat. At a time when the country was encountering social, economic, and political challenges, I'm inspired by the creativity and tenacity of men and women like my dad and my great grandmother.

In addition to embracing my own creativity, my dad taught me perseverance. He described how he loved school as a young man, and how at the age of 13, he missed over a month of classes when he fell ill. At the time, he was diagnosed with an enlarged heart. I would often think about how close to death he came at such a young age and what courage it took to overcome a serious illness early in life. He described how he was so weak that he stayed in bed, but he eventually recovered and was able to continue his education.

Learning about his illness when I was a small child turned into a lesson about the importance of healthy eating. I finally understood why he often said, "Candy rots your teeth" and "Soda ruins your kidneys." Basically, he felt any

form of junk food was bad for you, except for homemade desserts. In his mind, homemade cakes and pies were never junk food.

And my mom, born and raised in the Arkansas, perfected the art of baking southern desserts. My dad loved blueberry pie, blackberry pie, apple pie, bean pie, pecan pie and peach cobbler. In essence, any



William Tedford's high school graduation photo

fruit or nut that could be made into a pie, he loved it.

In addition, he enjoyed school and spending time with his classmates. He would talk about them all the time and some of the experiences they had growing up in Grenada.

Although life in Mississippi socially and politically was difficult in my father's teenage years, his small group of classmates could lean on each other. My dad attended Grenada Colored High School, which, prior to 1966, had two high schools, Grenada High School and Grenada Colored High School, where the black students attended. He was extremely proud of his classmates and their achievements. He often boasted about how many classmates went

to college and earned their master's degrees and others acquired their PhD's. My dad was serious about education, including my own. I understand now why he would often stress the power and value of a good education.

In one stance he and his classmates came together and helped a girl who lived in a rural area outside of town pick cotton on her family farm so she could attend class. During that time, some families – out of economic necessity – put a higher priority on having their children work the land than letting them go to school. My dad and his classmates were willing to sacrifice some of their education to help this young lady fulfill her obligations to her family so that she ultimately could continue her education.

In addition to academics, my dad loved sports. He played football and had the opportunity to go to Jackson State University on an athletic scholarship. However, he was drafted in the United States Army shortly after graduating from High School. He proudly served his country in the Korean War and received an honorable discharge in 1955. He moved to Chicago shortly thereafter and began working at the U.S. Postal Office.

My dad was married for

a short time prior to coming to Chicago and had one son, my brother, William Lynnwood Tedford. He would later meet and marry my mom, Atlean Chism in 1965 while he was working for the U.S. Postal Office. My brother Victor and I were born to this union.

As a professional painter, he inspired my love of the arts and crafts. He loved painting homes and restoring wood. He started his own business as a painter in the 1960's and was well known throughout Chicago as a painter. He would talk about how he and his uncle would paint several homes on Chicago's North Shore. He often described the beautiful woodwork in the homes and how well maintained the homes were in the area. He instilled in us an appreciation for things that are old and unique. Just because something is old doesn't mean it's not beautiful, appreciated and valuable. That's one of the reasons why I became a real estate broker and investor. My dad was adamant about black people owning real estate.

Almost 20 years after moving to Chicago, my dad attended Dawson Technical Institute – City Colleges of Chicago. He earned a certificate in Mechanical Drafting in 1982. In addition to working at the United States Post Office, He

also worked at the Wisconsin Steel Mill and Chicago Housing Authority.

My Dad managed to stay connected with several classmates as I was growing up. One classmate is Mrs. Louise Lewis (aka Ms. Dolly). She is vivacious, full of energy and a wonderful conversationalist at 89 years of age. My dad would take me to visit her and her husband growing up. She and my dad would keep in touch and talk often about growing up in Grenada.

My dad made his transition January 21, 2011. After my dad passed away, Ms. Dolly would call my mom periodically just to check on us. Now that both my parents have transitioned, Ms. Dolly calls me to check on me from time to time. I'm very grateful for all the lessons my dad taught me and our time together. There are five lessons that I will share here:

1. *Envy and jealousy are a waste of time and energy. How we must value and celebrate our achievements and others.*

2. *No matter how many mistakes you make, if you have breath in your body there is the opportunity to do better and change.*

3. *Always be willing to help others in need, because you never know when you may need someone to help you in your time of need.*

4. *Always be on time.*

5. *Eat well so you can be well.*

My Closing

There is nothing like a daughter's love for her father and a father's love for his daughter. Special thanks to Sandra for sharing him and his love for his birthplace. The following comments that I received recently from Barron Caulfield, the brother of Dorothy Caulfield Wiman, are another example of how the lives of members of our Yalobusha community are connected.

"I have good memories of Cora (Folson) and still see her grandson Ricky from time to time. Cora's next-door neighbor, Mrs. Annie Mae Cook, also worked for us from time to time. Her granddaughter, Lisa Cook, worked for me at the housing authority while someone was on maternity leave. One day I told Lisa that her grandmother had lied to me. "What do you mean my grandmother lied to you?" Lisa asked somewhat indignantly. I told her that story. I was supposed to wear glasses starting in the 1st grade but wouldn't. Annie Mae told me if I wore them until I was 11 years old I would never have to wear them again. I still wear them. We had a good laugh."



William Tedford (right) is pictured with his classmates.

Hold The Date And Please Accept My Invitation

The Dottie Quayle Chapman Reed Collection Opening and Presentation is scheduled September 29 at noon in Archives and Special Collections at the University of Mississippi Library. I graduated from the University of Mississippi in 1974 and worked for the Uni-

versity for three years after graduation. My column, which began in June 2018 in the North Mississippi Herald, led to an oral history project collaboration with the Center for the Study of Southern Culture entitled Black Families of Yalobusha. The library has acquired

my papers and memorabilia from 1970 to date. The event is open to the public and is part of the 60th Anniversary Celebration of the integration of the university. For more information or questions, please contact 662-915-1595 or email archivesdept@olemiss.edu