

# Johnny Wayne Herod

## A Proud Water Valley Son

Starting last year this column turned its focus to outstanding black men of Yalobusha County though we will continue to write about outstanding area women. Readers should feel free to recommend any individual who has been a positive force in the community.

I want to take this opportunity to thank Mayor Donald Gray for welcoming me and my friends when we visited Water Valley in September. We all gathered at B.T.C. Grocery where my high school classmates, Diane Cox Egerson, Delice Reese and Carolyn Wright, joined us. The police escort was a highlight!

Our time in Water Valley was part of a celebration marking the opening of my collection of papers and memorabilia at the University of Mississippi J.D. Williams Library. The collection includes articles from this column and 50 years of documents and photographs related to my work at the university and beyond. A display of items from my collection will be available for viewing through Black History Month 2023. Eventually all will be digitized.

In addition to my classmates who came to Oxford, I was honored that four of the outstanding women featured in this column, along with their families, also attended – Juanita Polk Fleming, Dorothy Kee, Mildred Polk and Ora Lee Phillips.

When I called Cyndy Herod to ask if she would write about her husband, Johnny Wayne, I tried to remember the last time I spoke or saw him – I believe he was in the



Johnny and Cynthia Herod

military. I was a year ahead of Johnny at Davidson High and knew his family well. His father was the last principal



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 that features black men.

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at Davidson, when the school system was still segregated. His mother Rachel was featured in this column on August 8, 2019. Johnny and I always paused for a catch-up talk whenever we ran into each other. I was always a tad amused that he, like many in the South, was called by two names.

His children offer open and honest accounts, but it is Cyndy's unique perspective – as a friend, wife, co-worker and partner, that is most intriguing, as someone raised thousands of miles away from the South, in Hawaii.

### By Cynthia M. Herod November 8, 2022

Born in Yalobusha County, the eldest son from five children of Rachel Lee Campbell Herod and John Watson Herod, Johnny Wayne Herod represents a modest southern upbringing. We met in the winter of 1975, serving as pharmacy technicians in the US Army at Silas B. Hays Army Community Hospital on Fort Ord, California, in the Monterey Peninsula area. We had similar goals for "life after the military." Johnny and I had easy conversations and became fast friends. Johnny was different from others in our hospital company. He was a proud southern guy and was not bothered much by what others thought of him, his accent, or his beliefs. His plans for life were set – get through his three-year enlistment and return home to attend school in Mississippi, utilizing his GI Bill for education. Because of our similar education goals, many of our peers saw us as oddities, so we spent much of our free time together. We had a "means to our goals," much different from many of our soldier peers.

Johnny's mom and dad taught their children that hard work was always important to get ahead in life. As a child, he would often go to the fields to pick cotton with his mom. This was a very grueling and poorly rewarded job. His dad hired him as a janitor for the school system during the summers after he completed sixth grade. His eighth grade year, he was the janitor for one of the elementary school buildings, becoming the janitor for the two elementary buildings his ninth grade and through high school. This was very hard work, but Johnny had the drive and his parents set examples he was eager to follow. He soon "employed" his brother and sister to assist in cleaning the buildings.

After high school and through junior college, Johnny found employment as an orderly at Yalobusha General Hospital during his summers, weekends and school breaks. He was the first black, full-time orderly for the hospital. (His great-uncle, John D. Campbell, was the janitor for the hospital and also held their first black part-time orderly position, paving the way for Johnny.) His dream was still of becoming a doctor. This dream was fueled by his work at Yalobusha General Hospital and the coaching of his mentor, Dr. Joe Walker, the town's cardiologist who helped him get this orderly position. He would go on rounds with Dr. Walker on some Fridays. Dr. Walker would allow Johnny to observe operations and visit with patients with him. But being the oldest of five children, Johnny, knew his family could not afford to fund his educational endeavors. He had to set goals.

Johnny's education began at Davidson Elementary School in Water Valley. He attended Coffeetown Elementary School for his third and fourth grade years, returning to Davidson Elementary and then Davidson High School through ninth grade. Johnny always refers to Davidson as "the black school" when he talks of his memories. He remembers his dad being a principal or assistant principal throughout his high school years. His dad was referred to as Mr. Herod, and he lived in constant fear of being sent to the principal's office if he ever messed-up in class.

Living through a segregated time left mental scars that even to this day haunt his memories. Always an athlete, during the second year of "choice of school" integration, Johnny began playing Pony league baseball for the city. He would later play both baseball and basketball during his ninth grade year for Davidson High School (1969). Johnny continued his athletics as the city of Water Valley schools moved to "full integration" in the early 1970s. At Water Valley High School, he stated he mainly "rode the bench" for baseball, playing under the coaching of Mr. Butler McLeod. He did, though, excel at basketball coached by Mr. Lincoln Shields and strongly expected



Johnny and Cynthia Herod with Jerrell Waika Herod, Natalie Herod and family

to receive a basketball scholarship from at least a junior college at graduation. He worked hard to prepare for this next level at Water Valley High, but opportunities changed when Coach Ed Easley left to pursue a job in insurance sales and Mr. McLeod took over as the basketball coach. Johnny remembers that they were a good senior squad, but for the first game of the season the coach changed the starting line-up, under "advisement." Johnny remembers not playing his best games for part of his senior year. When the team regrouped and tried to improve their game, they could not play very well. Many of the black players, including Johnny, purposely chose to perform subpar in retaliation for some players being removed from that starting rotation. He always felt these adolescent antics ruined his chances to play in college. Although he felt he earned the honor of receiving a sports letter for basketball, he never received one nor did he get the symbolic letterman's jacket from either Davidson HS, which he wanted, nor from Water Valley HS – both personal disappointments for him. At first, Johnny probably did not recognize there was differential treatment in athletics. After all, they were all skilled athletes, weren't they? He did not think that his upbringing in this segregated environment was different until he left home and started experiencing life elsewhere.

Without scholarships nor family financial support, Johnny did on-campus work study at Northwest Mississippi Junior College during the week, traveling home to Water Valley on his weekends to perform his job at Yalobusha General Hospital. In the spring of 1975, he received his Associates degree in Pre-Medicine Studies. He felt he was on his way to medical school! Unfortunately, graduating from NWJC triggered a change in his draft status. There was still a war in Vietnam, and he was suddenly eligible to be drafted into the military. Being ever the planner, Johnny chose to enlist and hopefully get to choose his military specialty, rather than be drafted and take his chances.

Johnny was promised the Military Occupation Specialty (MOS) of the only medical field open at that time for voluntary enlistment, pharmacy technician. He was soon off to Fort Jackson, South Carolina for basic military training, then on to Fort Sam Houston, Texas for the grueling, intensive program with high failure potential, Pharmacy Technician School. Always a very good science and mathematics student, Johnny graduated from pharmacy training and was sent to Fort Ord, California for his first permanent duty station. I believe we met his first day with the medical company in the barracks commons area. At that time, though, neither of us was in the market for a life partner! We remained good friends

and often worked together through his first year in California. On a visit home later that year, Johnny recalled his sister, Barbara, told his mom, "Johnny's gonna marry that girl." He was not amused.

Johnny received orders to PCS (Permanent Change of Station) to Wuerzburg, Germany in December 1976. He was to report in April. I guess we found each other to be great partners, because on February 25th, 1977, he asked my parents' permission to marry me. Although our plans were to marry the next year in Hawaii when we both finished our enlistments, Johnny flew back to Monterey in July. He claimed he needed my company to enjoy his time in Europe. We married and weathering the military red tape and requiring re-enlistments for both of us, I was able to join him finally that November. We spent our first Christmas in Germany.

During our months apart, and in his off times, Johnny studied, trained and eventually certified as an EMT through evening classes with his fellow soldiers stationed at the Wuerzburg Army Hospital. He was kept very busy during his days, shuttling between military posts within the hospital's command, running their health clinic pharmacies. Once I arrived, we were assigned to the Kitzingen Air Base Health Clinic, about 30 miles from the main hospital, and ran their pharmacy together as a very good team. Johnny and I took night classes there through the University of Maryland - European Campus, each completing hours of college courses with main studies of the German language for conversation. We always joked that we spoke great German as long as we were together to complete each other's sentences! Two years later, our first child, a son, Jerrell Waika Herod, was born in Germany. Johnny and I chose to honor my heritage by giving our children Hawaiian middle names and to continue the legacy of honoring his father and his grandfather by using their initials, that he too carries. We returned to the United States (PCS) two months later, on April 1, 1979.

Our new duty station was on Fort Riley, Kansas. In October 1980, I completed my Army enlistment and returned full time to college, utilizing my GI Bill, at Kansas State University in Manhattan, Kansas, and Johnny continued to his military service at Fort Riley. He was a staff sergeant (E-6), and head pharmacy technician for the Big Red One, First Medical Battalion. In the summer of 1983, after celebrating the birth of our daughter, Rachelle Pualilia Herod, lovingly named in honor of our moms, we moved to Lawrence, Kansas and I began studying pharmacy at the University of Kansas School of Pharmacy. Johnny would travel the two hours, each way, from Fort Riley to Lawrence, twice a week for a year to assist me with caring for our children while I studied. Johnny completed his active-duty commitment in the spring of 1984 and would continue his military service as a sergeant first-class (E-7) Army reservist, stationed with the 325th Medical Hospital unit in Independence, Missouri. He applied to the University of Kansas School of Pharmacy and was accepted in the class that began in August 1984. I graduated in pharmacy in May 1986. Johnny graduated with his pharmacy degree in May 1987. Earning his degree and pharmacist license, Johnny accepted a commission as a second lieutenant (O-1) in Medical Service Corp of the US Army Reserves. In addition, he was offered his first civilian pharmacist position with Dillon's Stores (Kroger Company) in Olathe, Kansas. Johnny then worked for the SuperX pharmacy chain in Lawrence, to be closer to home, for a year. Dillon's soon purchased the SuperX store, and Johnny came along with the fixtures! He remained and was promoted to pharmacy manager with the Dillon's Pharmacies after that merger.

Johnny retired from the Army Reserves as a captain (O-3) after 20 years of service in 1995. We both soon