

The Women Who Worked On Dupuy, Panola And Leland Streets



By Dottie Chapman Reed

Reed is a native of Water Valley and graduated from Davidson High School in 1970. She has launched a project to compile and share info about women in the county who have made an impact on the African American community. Her column appears bi-monthly, with occasional exceptions. She can be reached at (678) 825-2356 or reed2318@bellsouth.net

Born and raised in Water Valley, I never knew or never noticed Dupuy or Leland Streets, but my mother, Helen, worked for the Gurners on Panola Street. We often walked on Panola on our way to church on Sundays. When I went to work with my mother, we walked up the Gurners' driveway into the kitchen through the back door.

The homes of white people smelled different to me, and I was fascinated by the size, the furnishings, the books, magazines and

the newspapers. When we went to other houses where my mother worked as a maid, I was amazed by the

amount and different types of food and the fact that the kids had their own rooms. I was well aware at an early

age of the differences: We were Black, and they were White, the haves and the have nots. I played with some of the white kids but understood the friendship could only go so far and at a certain age had to be severed.

A "colored" sign hung on the door where we went to the doctor, and going to the dentist for preventive dentistry was unheard of. If and when we went to the dentist, it was to get a tooth pulled, not to save it. In my early years I knew very

little about Water Valley's white community or lifestyles aside from the interaction with the white families my mother worked for or the one family I babysat for in the summer or the white landowners that my dad might have done business with.

Camille Fly Dautrich, a Water Valley native has again obliged us by collecting memories of the women who worked in her neighborhood, the majority of whom I knew and am now pleased to know more

about.

She describes a way of life unfamiliar to many of us in the black community. I firmly believe that the sacrifices these women made and the work they did in nurturing these families perhaps made Water Valley a tad better place to live in terms of race relations at that time. Yet now, we are experiencing a rise in overt racism nationally like we have never seen before. When will we ever learn? Will we ever learn? What can we do about it?

So Much More Than 'The Help': The Women Who Helped Raise Us

By Camille Fly Dautrich

Growing up with a whole crew of Baby Boomers in the Dupuy/Panola/Leland Streets neighborhood, my friends and I moved easily from one house to another. We knew everyone's parents and everyone's pets. In many cases, we also knew another member of these families – the women who came to our houses, cooked, cleaned and helped raise us. In searching for a word to call these ladies, the most common one might be our "maids," but in truth, they were much, much more.

I've tried to compile some memories of a few of these extraordinary people, who left their own homes and children to take care of us, and I've asked my neighborhood friends to help me. One of the best tributes was from Dorothy Caulfield Wiman, who wrote about Cora Folson. Dorothy's memories have appeared in this space as a stand-alone column, but here are some additional stories about other ladies.

We have many good memories, but unfortunately, we don't have photographs to go with them, so this story is going to be heavy on copy

and light on images. Still, we all have pictures in our heads of these women we loved.

African-American friends, please keep in mind that while it might not seem fair that, in many ways, we took these ladies away from you, rest assured—we loved them very much and they taught us many life lessons.

My nearest childhood neighbors were the Throop girls—India, Carlisle and Ruth—and their housekeeper, "Bobbie," Barbara Jean Hervey was a favorite of mine. Bobbie was so classy—pretty to look at and fun to be with. Here's what Carlisle (now Carlisle Parsons Wood) had to say after a sisters' get-together with Ruth and India in Colorado:

"As I write, Ruth and I are sitting on a plane waiting to be towed back to the gate due to maintenance issues. So, I am thinking of our Bobbie who was a best friend to Mama and like another mother to us. Here are a few of my memories of her:

- She sang "O Holy Night" at her church on Christmas Eve, and she would sing it for us before that day.
- She was a wonderful cook. I especially loved her blackberry cob-

bler, which she made for me on my birthday. I try to make it now, but it never seems as good as hers. And she made potato cakes, which were like fried patties of mashed potatoes with a light crust.

- She taught me to iron, and I think of her when I get the ironing board down.

- I wonder sometimes if Bobbie knew how much we loved and appreciated her. I hope so."

Ruth Throop Wilbourn added, "Yes, Bobbie Hervey was our favorite and was just like a member of our family." India Throop Mount sent a photo of Bobbie to be included with this story.

A little further afield but still in the neighborhood, Genny Wiley Seely wrote about Sarah Brooks. Genny was a few years older than I was and was a best friend to my late sister, Harriet. Here's what Genny wrote:

"We moved to Water Valley when I was four, and the lady I remember keeping me when we lived on Kimmons Avenue was Sarah Brooks. She lived over the hill from us. When she was helping me get dressed, she

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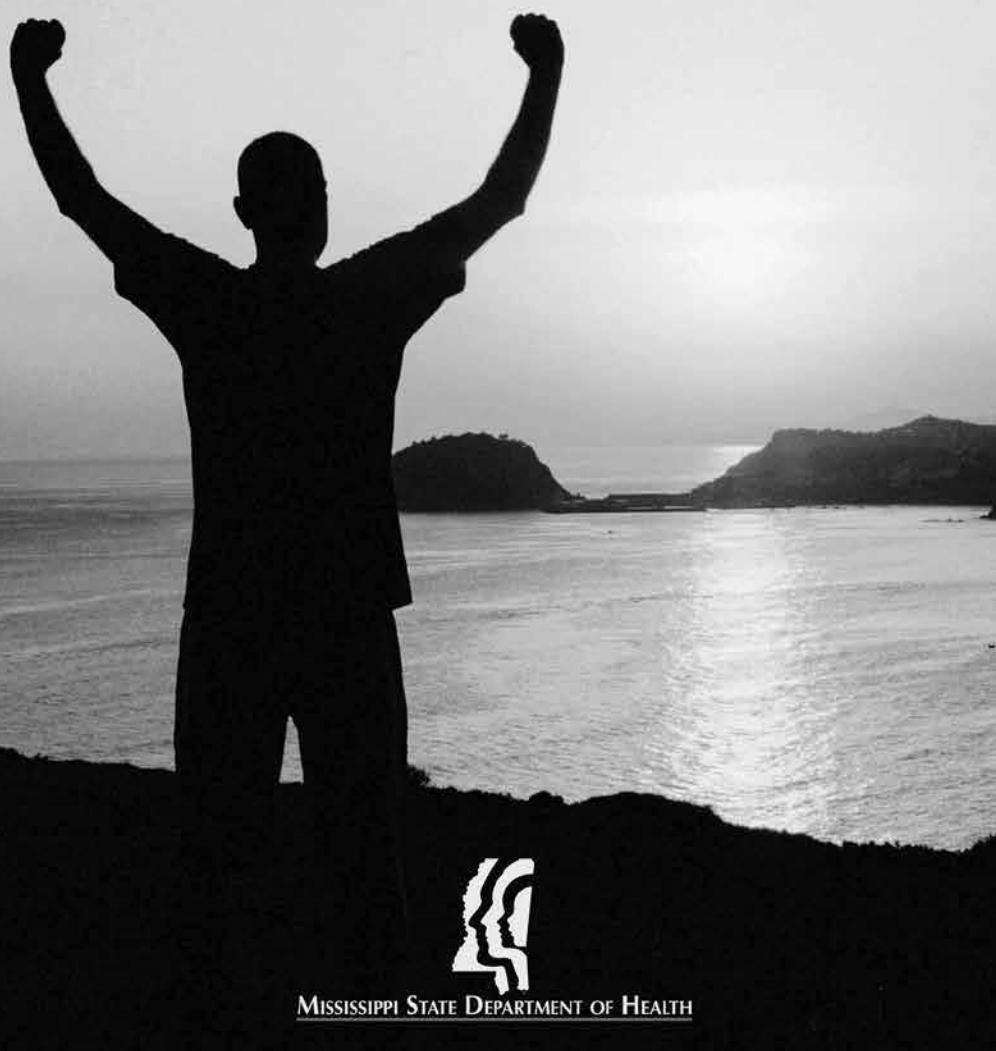
The Throop girls with an unidentified lady (above).

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