

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.



Ora Lee Phillips

## 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.

Through the years, he has received awards including Baseball Region 2 3A MVP and Pitcher of the Year 2019, MAC All State Team Pitcher 2019, All Region Fire Team Pitcher 2017 and 2019 and Honorable Mention Quarterback 2018. He was also a member of the 2018 State Championship Football Team.

During his entire school career, Clark has been on the Principal's Honor Roll. He has received awards for highest averages in several subjects as well as advanced level scores on state tests. His Algebra state test placed him in the top three percent of students in the state.

Clark will attend Mississippi Delta Community College with an academic and athletic scholarship. He will be a member of the Mississippi Delta Trojans baseball team and will major in Pre-Health Professions, Physical Therapy.

Clark is the son of Hal and Jill Clark. He extends thanks to his family, friends, teachers and coaches who have supported him throughout his educational journey and helped him earn the honor of salutatorian.

### Salutatorian

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.

Burruss was a member

## 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 Jerrill Swearengen, Sakia Townsend and Carlye Laine Washington, 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.



Salutatorian Blayne Clark (above) and Historian Grant Burruss 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 Burruss. He