

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.

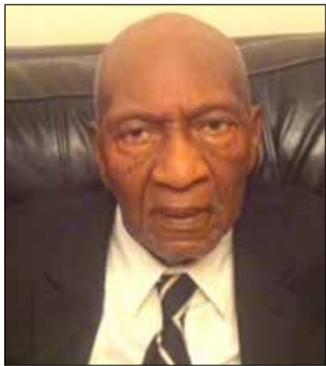
I graduated from Mississippi Vocational College in Itta Bena, Mississippi in 1964 with a BS degree in Social Sciences and did my student teaching at Davidson High School with a contract to become a permanent teacher after I completed student teaching. This was a unique situation because usually one was 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

Percy Haywood, Jr.

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.....
(Continued on next page)

Percy Haywood, Sr. Work, Church And Family

By Russell Lee Haywood

When I think about Dad three things come to mind: Work, Church, and Family. Dad was a farmer and a very good one. I don't know of anything that dad could not plant and grow. He raised cotton for a living, which consisted of two seasons of work: 1) planting/growing season, and 2) harvest season. Dad would do all the planting. But during the growing season we, the sons, would work the field or crops. We had to hoe the cotton to keep it clean from grass and weeds, which would hinder the growth and production, a major job that required 2-3 months of work. Dad supervised us and worked along with us to ensure that the quality of work was there.

During the harvest season we had to pick the cotton, which was also major work, and took another 2-3 months to get the harvest completed. Dad supervised this entire process from start to finish and worked beside us each day. During the growing and harvest season, we worked from sun-up to sun-down to get the job done. Dad worked with us the entire time while also performing other duties. He knew how to manage the crop so that at harvest time the output was bountiful. He was an excellent farmer because he knew what to do and how to do it.

Dad also raised corn but not for human consumption. It was used as feed for the other farm animals (cows, hogs, and chickens). All were sources of food: milk and butter from the cows, meat from the hogs and eggs from the chickens. Dad also had a large garden on at least an acre of land. The garden provided us with vegetables for the entire year. In the spring and summer everything was fresh out of the garden. Mother canned foods that we ate in the fall and winter months.

Dad was very active as a member and deacon of Pleasant Green Baptist Church in Water Valley where he served as head of the deacon board and a Sunday School teacher. He held additional offices as well. Dad was a great father and provider to our large family. I can't remember anything that we really needed that Dad did not provide for us. He was not a rich man, but he did a superb job of taking care of us and meeting our needs. Family was "The Most" important thing to him and we saw that in all the love that he did for us. We never had to hear Dad say I love you because he said it with his actions and in the many other ways, he showed us he cared.

Dad was a social person who loved being around people and talking, people felt the same about him. I can still hear his loud, joyful laugh today. During the crop growing and harvest season Monday - Friday and half day on Saturday we were always working. He imparted his work ethics upon us, but on Sundays with no exception, we attended church and participated in church. When school was in session Monday - Friday we were in school again no exception. He stressed that we needed to get a good education. Dad did not have a high school education, but he was a smart man, with a lot of knowledge, and it showed when you were around him. Lastly, he also impressed upon us to "Take Care of Your Mother" and "Take Care of Each Other."

Percy Haywood, Sr. – Like Father, Like Son

By James Hubert Haywood

Percy Haywood, Sr. was the father of seven sons, and I am the fifth son. I will begin by saying that my father was a family man who loved his family and dedicated his life working for their welfare. He always wanted 'His Boys,' as he would say, to do better than he did. He would also say, "You boys have a much better opportunity to be successful than your daddy, so do something with those opportunities because you only get one chance." My daddy worked hard, a farmer for most of his life. After he stopped farming and after we all graduated from high school, he worked at Motts Chicken Processing Plant in Water Valley for many years. He taught us the value of hard work and always told us never to look for a handout but always be ready to lend a helping hand to someone in need. That statement, an important factor to me, has guided me through my entire life.

Daddy encouraged us to get as much education as we possibly could because we were growing up in a different world than he did, and education would be the key to our success. I found that to be a very true statement as I grew older. Daddy also taught us to let your words be your "bond" – in other words what you say is what you mean and what you will do. He taught us to always carry ourselves in a respectful manner, if you carry yourself in a respectful way then people will respect you in return. Daddy believed that a man was responsible for his family. He was the provider for his family. It is good for a husband and wife to work together to support a family, but ultimately the responsibility is yours as he would always say. I have always tried to live by those words of wisdom.

Daddy taught us to never forget our "Roots," where you came from, always be humble, grateful, loving and kind because you never know whom you might need to lend you a helping hand someday. Daddy never had wealth, but he had something more valuable than wealth, he had wisdom. He would quote the Bible a lot, and one thing he would always say, 'Get wisdom but in all your

'Proud Of My Roots'

By James Hubert Haywood

I am James Haywood, the fifth son of Percy and Luvenia Haywood. I was born in Water Valley, Mississippi on July 8, 1946. I was reared in Water Valley and went to school at both Davidson Elementary and Davidson High School. I graduated from high school in 1965 and attended Alcorn State University graduating in 1969 with a BS degree in Biology and with a minor in Chemistry. After graduating from Alcorn State University in 1969 and completing my Student Teaching at Liberty High School in Liberty, MS, I taught Jr. High Science at Davidson High School the school year of 1969-70. In the summer of 1970, I enrolled at the University of Mississippi pursuing a master's degree in Combine Sciences. While pursuing my master's degree, I was drafted into the United States Army in November of 1970. I was stationed at Fort Polk, Louisiana. After completing my Basic and Advanced Individual Training at Fort Polk I was sent to Frankfurt, West Germany, stationed with the 21st Replacement Battalion as a Troop Movement Specialist. After completing my tour of duty in Europe, I was discharged from the Army in November of 1972.

I then relocated to Omaha, NE where I began my professional career with the Metropolitan Utilities District of Omaha. The Metropolitan Utilities District is a political division of the State of Nebraska created to supply Natural Gas and Safe Drinking Water for the City of Omaha. I began working in the Water Quality Division as a Water Analyst. As more mandates were issued by the Environmental Protection Agency, it became necessary to have a person with a degree in Biology to meet those mandates. Since I was already on staff and had the qualifications, I was promoted to Biologist, becoming the first person to hold the position of Biologist for the Metropolitan Utilities District. It was an honor and I thank the people of Omaha for having confidence in me that they were receiving safe drinking water in the City of Omaha. I retired in 2006 after a thirty-four-year career with the Metropolitan Utilities District.

I am a member of St. Mark Baptist Church where I have served as deacon and Sunday School teacher for more than 35 years. I currently volunteer with the Douglas County Jail and Prison Ministry, teaching Bible classes and conducting worship services once a month for incarcerated men at the Douglas County Jail. I am also part of my church's Hope 4 Hungry program, which provides weekly food to the needy in our church community and provides ongoing food and clothing for our adopted public school in our church neighborhood.

I am proud to say I got my humble beginnings in Water Valley, and I am very proud of my roots.

I love coming back home and seeing so many of the great people who were a part of shaping and molding me to be the person I am today. I am so blessed to have grown up this community, Water Valley will always be!



The author, Dottie Reed (back, center) and her sons met Percy Haywood, Jr. and Reeds's cousin, Cleala M. Adams, when Providence Baptist Church visited the Coca Cola Museum in Atlanta in the summer of 1995.

A Career Of Service

By Russell Lee Haywood

Born in Water Valley, Mississippi, I attended public school and graduated from Davidson High School in 1968. After finishing high school, I decided to go to Alcorn A & M College to continue my education. While attending Alcorn I majored in Social Science with a minor in Education. The four years that I spent at Alcorn were very enjoyable because during part of the four years that I was there two of my brothers, James and Verdia were there also. I was a member of the Social Science Club and during my senior year I served as President of the Social Science Club. I also joined and was a member of Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, Inc. I graduated from Alcorn in 1972 and came back home to Water Valley. I really wanted to stay in Mississippi but at that time the economy was not good, and jobs were hard to find. I was offered a teaching position in a town near Water Valley, but I did not accept the position because I really did not want to teach.

Later in the summer of 1972 I relocated to Omaha, Nebraska where I had three brothers. The job market there was also not good due to the economy. But I was offered and accepted a position with Gulf-Mart Department Store as a Manager Trainee and Department Manager. I remained with this company until 1975 until the entire chain of stores closed. At this time, I was approached with getting out of the retail business field and getting into the social work/ human service field. ENCOR - East Nebraska Community of Retardation offered and I accepted a position as Residential Manager. This position consisted of opening Adult Group Homes for Mentally Challenged/Developmentally Disabled Individuals to live in the community. Until 1985 I worked in various positions including Program Manager and Area Manager, which involved helping these individuals develop work skills for job placement and providing support for group homes.

Next, I moved to New Orleans, Louisiana and began working for Employment Enterprise, Inc. as an Employment Service Specialist. By 1987, I was promoted to Pre-Vocational Director/Evaluator.

Between 1989 and 1992 I worked for Progressive Healthcare as a Qualified Mental Retardation Professional:

1986 - 1987 - Employment Enterprise, Inc - Promoted to Community Service Supervisor - responsible for the direct supervision of staff working with mentally challenged/developmentally disabled individuals being trained for competitive employment/job placement in the community.

1987 - 1989 - Employment Enterprise, Inc - Promoted to Pre-Vocational Director/Vocational Evaluator. Responsible for the direct supervision of staff. Duties also included completing vocational assessment. Writing and implementing an Individual Habilitation Plan for each client based on needs identified in the assessment.

1989 - 1992 - Accepted a position with Progressive Healthcare as Qualified Mental Retardation Professional - QMRP - responsible for the supervision of group homes for mentally challenged/developmentally disabled. Job duties included: supervising staff, developing individual program plans and analyzing program data.

1992 - Present - Employment Transition Services-President/Owner: Based on the growing needs of people with disabilities in Louisiana, I started a business/agency to address the employment needs of these individuals. I also have three other vocational centers in the south Louisiana area. As President and Program Director of the company/agency my duties include client selection, development and program implementation, staff development and working in compliance with local and state agencies. The focus of the agency is to work with businesses in the New Orleans area to provide work opportunities for Mentally Challenged/Developmentally Disabled individuals. I have worked with other agencies/committees to help provide a better life for individuals with a disability. Some of these include Human and Legal Rights committees for agencies in Louisiana and Nebraska, Louisiana agencies for Health and Safety, and Goodwill Industries of New Orleans Advisory Board.

I have always felt the need to assist and work with individuals who are not able to do for themselves. I am very active in my church, serving as a deacon, board assistant treasurer, assistant superintendent, finance committee and a former church auditor. I am married to Patrice (Fullwood) Haywood, and have one son, Davis Haywood of Huntsville, Ala.

Verdia Lee Haywood

A December 29th, 2009 article in the Fairfax, Virginia Times reported on the retirement of Water Valley native Verdia Haywood, their Citizen of the Year. The article was reprinted in the January 13, 2010 issue of this newspaper. He joined Fairfax County government in 1978 as an executive assistant to the County Executive. In 1981, Verdia was appointed Deputy County Executive for Human Services, becoming the county's first top-ranking African American. He became known as the architect of the county's human service delivery system. Verdia was credited during his tenure as Deputy County Executive for guiding the continual reorganization and improvement of the systems that serve the county's neediest residents. Verdia was awarded the Katherine K. Hanley Public Service Award

from Leadership Fairfax, Inc. in 2005 for his contribution to the quality of life in the community.

Verdia graduated from Davidson High School in 1966 and from Alcorn State University with a major in Social Science. He received his master's degree in Public Administration from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in 1972.

He recalls living on the Ingram Farm in Water Valley until his parents purchased the Roosevelt Hervey Farm from Mrs. Annie Hervey. This became the current Haywood home. He describes his father, Percy Sr. as a balanced and fair disciplinarian. His father had four sisters and one brother, all of whom migrated to Paducah, Kentucky when the railroad closed in Water Valley. Their Aunt Mildred still lives in Kentucky.