

# He Commanded Obedience And High Expectations

## Remembering Davidson Principal Joseph Honduras Ford

Last year Veronica Jarmon stopped by my booth at the Decatur, Georgia Book Festival. Seeing my Yalobusha T-shirt and my banner, she asked if I was from Water Valley. She said she was from Holly Springs. Within moments we were discussing our former high school principal, Joseph Ford, who worked at my alma mater, Davidson High, and hers, W. T. Sims High School, which became Holly Springs High following integration.

Mr. Ford, who died in 2012, left Davidson in 1968 to become the principal at W. T. Sims High School. The move broke many hearts. While his moving for a greater opportunity in a town home to Rust College and Mississippi Industrial College was understandable, we wished him well with sadness.

Mr. Ford's departure really hit me hard because he was also a member of my church, Miles Memorial CME, and one of my first strong male role models. Once I got my driver's license, he asked me to run school errands in his car – a responsibility I took seriously. He assigned my best friend, Alice Faye White, and me the job of filling the vending machines. Many days, embarrassingly, I could only afford nabs and a drink versus lunch in the cafeteria.

The aura of being in high school was fascinating for me and many others, I believe. Davidson High School stood high on a hill above the elementary school. And as an elementary school student, I was so excited, and awe struck when we got to climb those tall steps up to the high school for what we called chapel. I knew I might see my older siblings sitting in their classrooms and they might see me. Chapel, which included singing, prayer and a program, was held in what to me felt like a huge auditorium that also had a stage. When you came through the front door of the building, you could see the principal's office straight ahead, and you never wanted to go there! Mr. John Dowsing, who was the principal at that time, was much loved and respected and also a member of my church.

When I was in the ninth grade my class moved over to the new high school building, which opened in 1961 – another exciting transition. Prior to that we were transported daily for lunch in our first cafeteria. We also had a gymnasium for the first time in this new high school so we could form basketball teams. Mr. Ford coached the girls' basketball team, the Tigerettes. When our men's basketball team – the Tigers coached by Lincoln Shields – made it to the state basketball championships in 1965, it was a highlight of Mr. Ford's tenure. The Tigers had lost only one game in the regular season, and though they lost the final game of the state championship for an overall record of 38-3, the team provided a thrilling season that alumni still talk about today with pride and excitement because of the recognition their run brought to our school.

The former high school building on Calhoun Street became the upper elementary or 'middle school' though the term was not popular then. In 1999 fire completely destroyed the building. It had not been used for years, and sadly, the fire took the majority of our history – records, class pictures and trophies, etc. Then on August 17, 2021, I felt a deeper sense of loss when one of my high school classmates called to let me know that another building – the one-time lower elementary school also on Calhoun Street – was on fire. Now only the vacant lots remain.



Joseph Ford pictured with his daughters, Tammy and Kimberly. Tammy passed away last year.



Joseph Ford (center) with family members (from left) Tammy, Kimberly, Joshua, Dwain and Jonathan.



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 also features black men.

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[www.blackwomenofyalobusha.com](http://www.blackwomenofyalobusha.com)

After Veronica told me about a Joseph Ford Scholarship, I received an invitation to participate from Rothenia Walton, another former Holly High student. I told both women I would love to connect with members of Mr. Ford's family. On March 23rd I got a message from someone related to Joseph Ford and responded immediately by email. Two days later Kimberly Ford, Mr. Ford's oldest daughter, called. Ironically I had just that day mailed my scholarship donation.

We were both elated to connect. I knew her as a little girl with thick braids and remembered her mother, Wilma, as a very classy lady who taught English. I mentioned how much we loved her dad and really missed him when he left Davidson. He taught me responsibility and garnered the highest level of respect from our student body. He was responsible for many academic upgrades, facility improvements and equal accommodations.

Of course, I had to tell her that my first and last discipline came in ninth grade in my home room with Mr. Hugh Percy Lark, when her dad, on his morning stroll, looked into our classroom through the door window. I am not sure what came over me – and I am so embarrassed to confess – I stuck out my tongue at him, thinking, I guess, that he would not see me. Wrong! He bounded through the door and smacked my hand with his wooden paddle, delivering my worst and most embarrassing moment as a high school freshman. Needless to say I never did that again and obviously never forgot that lesson.

I told Kim the last time I saw her father was at a Davidson High School reunion and added I was sure several of us would love to hear about his life after Davidson. She agreed to provide as much information as she could. I told her we wanted to hear about her younger sister, Tammy, who passed away last year; and about her mother, Wilma, who passed even earlier. Kim told me that after her parents divorced, Mr. Ford remarried and had two sons, Jonathan and Joshua, giving both his middle name. Kim also mentioned an Aunt Carol and Uncle Melvin, her father's siblings. How eager I was to speak with all of them!

Mr. Ford's obituary provided much illuminating information. He was born in Holly Springs on January 20, 1930, the oldest of five children born to Reverend Joseph Honduras Ford, Sr. and Willie Mae Stewart Ford. Reverend Ford, a twin and native of Tunica, pastored churches in Canton and Charleston before moving the family back to Holly Springs.

As a boy, Mr. Ford attended the Rosenwald School, where Mr. W. T. Sims was the principal. In 1947, he earned his high school diploma from the Mississippi Industrial College High School Department, which was one of the few high school options in the surrounding area. His high school classmates included Geneva Bishop Toliver and Ruby Buggs Hall, who became educators as well. After earning his Bachelor of Science degree from Tuskegee Institute, now Tuskegee University in Alabama, he spent four years in the Air Force. Mr. Ford completed his first master's degree in agriculture from Tuskegee and a second in administration from Michigan State University in East Lansing.

Since childhood he was an active member of Anderson Chapel CME church and as an adult he served as a trustee, class leader, Sunday school superintendent, greeter, steward board, board of Christian education and choir member. Known as a biblical scholar Mr. Ford taught Sunday School for 60 years. He was even active on the District and Regional levels of the CME Church.

### First Position Was At Davidson

Davidson High School, where he taught chemistry and biology and coached basketball, was his first teaching position. He was promoted to principal in 1965 when Mr. John Dowsing accepted a position out of town. When Mr. Ford left Davidson in 1968, he returned home to be the principal at W. T. Sims. Two years later in 1970 he became first black principal at Holly Springs High when the schools merged through integration.

Mr. Ford served on the 911 Board, the Extension Service Board, the Holly Springs Vo-Tech Craft Committee and on the Marshall County School Board for many years. He was the first black President of the



Joseph Ford (right) and all four of his siblings including Melvin Ford (left) were educators.

Mississippi Association of Secondary School Principals, 1978 -1980. He was first black real estate agent in Marshall County, a member of the NAACP and the American Legion Post #250. Mr. Ford was active in the Powell Chapel Lodge #339, a 33rd degree Mason and a Shriner. When he retired in 1990, he was a lifetime member of the Mississippi Association of Educators and the National Educators Association and a member of the Marshall County Retired Teachers Association. Still active he worked as a GED instructor at Northwest Community College.

It is not surprising that all of Mr. Ford's four siblings were also educators. Even his mother Willie Mae taught high school in Water Valley. According to his sister, Carol Moody, their mom worked with Mrs. Annie Kelley Montgomery, a supervisor of the Quaker-funded Jeanes teaching foundation who was in charge of monitoring teachers, curriculum and educational materials for Yalobusha County black schools. Carol taught in Marshall County schools, another sister taught in Batesville and her brother, Melvin, and another sister taught in Illinois.

When I asked Davidson High alumni Bettye White Milledge about her memories of Mr. Ford she said, "Mr. Ford was an inspiration to teachers, students and parents. He was an excellent educator and demonstrated a strong commitment to helping students to achieve their goals." Bettye was active in several school activities, a team leader and high scorer on the girls' basketball team. She, becoming an educator herself, remembers that Mr. Ford always had a listening ear.

Freddie Harris, known as Pee Wee, was the scorekeeper for the basketball team coached by Mr. Lincoln Shields during their 38-2 run, becoming state champion runners-up. Pee Wee said, "Mr. Ford was a strict disciplinarian, who commanded obedience and high expectations. One day Sidney Joseph, George (Dena) Lawrence, Jack Cook and I skipped school and went fishing. When we went back to school that day, of course we were called to the office. My girlfriend was Bessie Hudson and Dena was dating Bettye White. Mr. Ford said he could not understand how such smart girls could have us as boyfriends. While we spent too much time hanging out on the Block, where the clubs and a few black businesses were located. Sidney, Dena and I were student school bus drivers, and always helped out when needed. I appreciate Mr. Ford's guidance, mentorship and the trust he showed us. He had a gift for teaching and encouraging us to be our best selves."

Veronica, a 1972 graduate of Holly High said, "My four sisters and I attended Holly Springs High School during Mr. Ford's tenure as principal. With the words, "Govern yourselves accordingly," he conveyed to students, at each grade level, that he expected all of us to behave properly at all times and do nothing that would embarrass us or our families. One of my sisters remembers that Mr. Ford always wore suits and reminded students to "move along" to their next classes. Another of my sisters remembers that Mr. Ford personally knew our grandfather and that our grandfather would not allow us to participate in certain activities. However, in one instance, Mr. Ford allowed my sister to leave the school campus with a friend to purchase supplies for a school project. Mr. Ford issued the following warning: "I'll let you go this time, but don't you get into trouble." My sister and her classmate purchased the supplies they needed and returned to school without getting into any trouble."

### From His Daughter Kimberly Noel Ford:

After our family left Water Valley, my dad became the principal of W.T. Sims High School in Holly Springs from 1968 – 1970. After the integration of the high school, he became the principal of Holly Springs High School known as Holly High. He stayed at Holly High until his retirement in 1990. After retiring, he became a GED instructor for Northwest Community College. He was a member of the Marshall County School Board and the American Legion, keeping busy with both after retirement. While I can  
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say that growing up with your dad as the principal and your mom a teacher in the same school system was easy, I now realize how fortunate we were to spend that much time with them and have them involved with our daily lives. Assembly time at school was the same thing we heard at home: "everything involves courage and effort" and "govern yourselves accordingly."

Both sayings still ring in my mind and cause me to smile when I hear someone say it. My dad taught us to believe in ourselves, the value of education, preparedness and having faith. Anderson Chapel CME was where that faith was instilled, and I remember our church involvement included vacation Bible school, the choir, and the usher board. While I didn't always want to play for services on fifth Sundays, I know how proud my Dad was to see me at the piano. As a matter of fact, I don't think we could do any wrong in his eye and it goes without saying that we were truly loved.

### From His Son

#### Jonathan Honduras Ford:

Growing up, my dad took me everywhere with him. We went to church every Sunday, and I remember how consistent he was about that – it was just part of our routine. Sometimes when we went walking for exercise, he'd bring me and my brother along to play basketball while he got his workout in. Even in those simple moments, he always found ways to teach us something.

He made sure we knew he loved us, and he used different situations as learning opportunities. Whether it was during a walk or just talking at home, he would remind us that you can always learn something new every day and that learning never really stops. That mindset stuck with me and shaped how I see the world and raise my own son today.

### In Closing

For Blacks in the late 1930s and early 1940s, teaching was one of the main occupations that paid a worthwhile salary. One of my friends said that was how we ended up with such good teachers. But the sacrifices this work required – even to get only a high school diploma – are hard to fathom in today's world: the miles they had to walk or drive or the overnight stays with different families to complete their studies. It is worth remembering that in this time, within a 50-mile radius one of the only places for young residents go to high school was in Holly Springs, in a special department at Mississippi Indus-

trial College in Holly Springs.

The need to travel away from home and to find overnight accommodations from extended families or friends continued for strivers such as Mr. Ford, who wanted to go to college and graduate school. They were not allowed to attend white institutions that might have been closer, including the state's flagship university in Oxford.

Mr. Ford was 82 when he died on July 24, 2012. He remains an inspiration for his service to the community, his dedication to education and the many, many students and teachers whose lives he touched. I know I am not alone in recalling the great respect he earned from the student bodies at Davidson, W. T. Sims and Holly Springs High Schools.

He wore big shoes and carried a big stick!

*The Joseph H. Ford Scholarship Committee has provided the scholarship information below. I hope you will consider making a donation now or in the future.*

## HSHS Class of 1972 Joseph H. Ford Scholarship 2025

**Our Commitment**  
Greetings! Our Committee has done a fantastic job honoring our commitment as we continue to support this worthy cause. We promise to assist deserving students with a small stipend each year in honor of our former Principal. Last year with your help we assisted 3 students with \$500 each.

This note is to ask you for your annual contribution of \$35 or more to support this endeavor. Every donation helps a deserving student, so please give. Send your donation to:

P. O. Box 45,  
Holly Springs, MS



38635

Please make your money order or check payable to: Rothenia Walton. Your receipt will be mailed to you. Donations are due by the date below:

**May 10, 2025**

Questions or other payment options email rotheniawalton@gmail.com

## Who Says A Lady Can't Kill A Turkey?

Sheryn Goode's visitors Sunday were her daughter, Dana and Lee Huffman and bonus daughter, Linda, and David Shelton. They put out flowers at cemetery and ant poison. David also put ant poison in my yard. We all had a good visit.

Martha Box said she had a wonderful Sunday, she made it to church for the first time in three-and-a-half months.

"Hallelujah! Bro. Scarborough preached such a wonderful Palm Sunday message! Then we ate. Wow, those women cooked so good, I was fed great spiritually and physically! Course the food was celebrating Bro. Scarborough's 85 Birthday!" Martha reported.

As they say, Martha, "You've come a long way baby." I think you have anyway, friend girl!

Roland Hartley played ball all weekend. His grandmother, Faye Hartley said, "We are playing for championship in Flowood. Faye has been faithful to attend every game of Rowland's no matter how near or far.

Who says a lady can't kill a turkey? Well our lady, Kristie Hartley of Tillatoba, did and it's a beauty! Her brother, Nathan, said she's providing for the family. Way to go, Kristie!

On Sunday Donna came and brought pizza. After we ate, we visited great-grands, Haven Rose and Waylon Jr. and grandson, Waylon Dukes, Sr. Holly was at work. They were on their beautiful front porch when we got there. Holly has it decorated so pretty and comfortable.

We have really been enjoying this spring weather reported Ginger Harrison. It's so nice. Today at Pine Grove we celebrated Bro Scarborough's 85th birthday with lots of food, fun, and fellowship. Her son, Jake, did a fantastic job singing the special and they really enjoyed having moma (Martha Box) there with them. Martha insisted on driving herself. She does a great job taking care of herself.

Yes she does, Ginger! Happy birthday to Malinda Martin on the 16th; my sweet son, Timothy Sullivan, along with Julia Kerr and Ginny Sosabee celebrate the 17th; sweet Jackie Griffis celebrates



### TILLATOBA NEWS

By Patcie Deck

the 18th; Priscilla Mitchell celebrates the 19th; Mickey Reeves the 20th; and Melba Rodgers the 21st. May you all enjoy your special day.

Deborah McCool said after church yesterday she and Tommy motored to Senatobia. They stopped on the way and had a really good lunch of



**Kristie Hartley killed a big gobbler.**

chicken and dressing at a little store in Como.

"They have really good food, we have eaten there before. They really fill your plate up," Deborah asked.

Deborah and Tommy spent the afternoon with their son Christopher, along with Samantha, grandson, Hayden, and Mary, Samantha's mom. She is doing well, still doing dialysis and has started immunotherapy.

Deborah reported Hayden gave them all golf lessons about scoring and stuff while they watched the Masters tournament. He really knows his sports. They came home and stopped by their daughter, Kimberley's and Jason's house for a visit with them. Then they went home to check on their four-legged babies.

Sounds like you made a good day of it!

My son, Derek Deck of Cleveland visited a little while Monday morning.

Thought for the day... "I prefer not to think before speaking. I like being as surprised as everyone else by what comes out of my mouth."

### Patcie's Recipe of the Week

## Impossible Taco Pie

#### Ingredients

Ingredients  
1 pound ground chuck  
1/2 cup chopped onions  
One package taco seasoning  
Three Eggs.  
3/4 cup Bisquick baking mix  
1 1/4 cup milk  
1 cup grated cheddar cheese  
Sour cream and tomatoes are optional

#### Instructions

Grease 10 inch pie plate. Brown ground chuck and onions, drain, stir Inn taco seasoning and mix well. spoon into pie plate. Beat Bisquick, milk and eggs with wire whisk until smooth. Pour over beef mixture. Bake at 3:50 degrees for 25 to 30 minutes or until knife comes out clean. Sprinkle with cheese and put back in the oven until the cheese melts. Garnish with sour cream and tomatoes if desired.

## Kris With MoonBee Flowers Farm Is Presenter For The May FCS Program

I had a lot of fun at the Coffeerville Public Library's Plant swap last Thursday. I had the honor of presenting a program, Cooking with Herbs. The participants enjoyed learning tips for cooking with herbs and enjoyed a food demonstration of black-eyed pea salad with tangy vinaigrette served with tortilla chips. It was delicious!

We have a few more spaces for the May FCS After 5 which will be a floral design program. Our guest presenter will be Kris McKey from MoonBee Flowers Farm in Water Valley. The cost is \$35 per person and will include all supplies and a meal. Each participant will leave with a beautiful spring flower arrangement. You can register online at <https://reg.extension.msstate.edu/> or come by the Extension office. If paying at the Ex-

Living  
Well  
in Yaobusha County



### By Pamela Redwine

County Coordinator  
MSU Extension Agent III  
tension office, please pay with a check made out to MSU Extension. You must register and pay to be considered signed up for class. Registration deadline is May 6 or when all the slots are filled.

Sewing for Service will

meet on Monday, April 21 at 9 a.m. at the Extension office. Participants will begin working on wheel chair and walker bags for nursing home residents. Volunteers are needed to help cut out patterns, iron and sew.

There has been a change of plans and the April 4-H Cooking Kits will be ready to pick up next Thursday, April 24, and Friday, April 25.

The Looped with Love Crochet MHV Club will meet on Thursday, April 24, at 10 a.m. at the Extension Office. Please bring the yarn of your choice and a crochet hook.

The Home School 4-H Club will meet on Monday, April 28 at 1:30 at the Extension office. All participants are encouraged to bring their completed rod puppets with them as we will be working with them.

Don't forget, our

Healthy You exercise classes continue to meet twice a week.

Join us on Wednesdays in April at 9 a.m. at the Extension office for the chair exercise program. We are using the Stronger Seniors workout program that is designed to help seniors develop strength and enhance the ability to function in daily life. This is a great opportunity to engage in up to 50 minutes of physical activity. Wear comfortable clothes and bring water to drink.

Join us on Fridays in April at 9 a.m. at the Extension office as we continue our indoor walking program. We are using Leslie Sanson's Burn 30 workout program. This is a great opportunity to get at least 30 minutes of physical activity. Wear comfortable clothes, good walking shoes and bring water to drink.



The Create MHV club met on Wednesday, April 9th and made gourd bird houses and Jo Davis was the project leader. Everyone had a good time and left with a new birdhouse. Those who attended were: (back) Mary Fuquay, Lura Besiger, Jo Davis, (front) Julia Fernandez, Elsie Harrison, Georgia Wilkerson, and Sylvia Beene.