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SOUTH GEORGIA SUNDAY THE VALDOSTA DAILY TIMES

Sunday, February 28, 1999

Valdosta, Ga.

Pioneering pilot remembers racism

Valdosta native flew in WWII

By Joe Dunlop
THE VALDOSTA DAILY TIMES

VALDOSTA — Carrol S. Woods fought in the skies over Europe on 107 combat missions, spending the final seven months of World War II a prisoner in a Nazi camp.

In 1953, after re-enlisting in the same military that had drafted him into the largest conflict in human history, Woods



Woods in WWII



Woods today

stopped at a Georgia Holiday Inn. Woods was heading for his native Valdosta, commanding a group of men on their way to fer-

Committee honoring Woods

Retired U.S. Air Force Maj. Carrol S. Woods will be honored at a 2 p.m. ceremony today at the slaves monument in Sunset Cemetery in Lowndes County.

The former Tuskegee airman, World War II combat veteran and Valdosta native will not attend the service, organized by the Black History Committee.

ry C-119 cargo planes to Japan after the Korean War.

The Air Force captain, in uniform, was shown to a small room to eat his meal, out of sight of the white patrons.

"I was in charge of all these

people, and I was being treated like, I don't know what. Something less than an officer, for sure," Woods said. The uniform earned him some respect, but only in limited circles.

"Segregation was still strong,

and the attitude was about as cold as it was when we left. It didn't mean anything to the general public. To some people it did, but to most you were still ... I can't use the word."

The whites at the hotel who dutifully hid the decorated officer from the view of other patrons couldn't know the exceptional career the combat pilot would have. After retiring from the Air Force in 1961 a major, Woods began a second career at

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Woods

Alabama State University. He worked there for 23 years, retiring again as a purchasing agent for the school.

Woods, now 79, was one of the few African American soldiers to pilot a combat aircraft during World War II. The fabled Tuskegee Airmen are a modern symbol of perseverance and accomplishment for blacks, but Woods didn't capitalize on that role following the war. In part because of his continued military service, Woods said he did not participate in the civil rights movement.

"I was an observer during that period, I'm afraid," Woods said, adding he followed developments with interest. An arrest would have invited prosecution from both civil and military authorities, Woods said, something he didn't want.

"My priorities were somewhere else, is what it amounted to."

Now, Woods said many of the legal obstacles facing African Americans have been successfully battled by the NAACP and other groups.

"We're doing pretty good. We've got different problems now; the legal battle has pretty much been taken care of," he said. "It has to do with us now, I believe."

The 350-acre farm east of Valdosta that Woods was raised on remains a single tract or land. The 10th of 12 children, Woods was raised by parents who never got past the seventh grade. He graduated Dasher High School in 1939, and traveled to Washington, D.C. before being drafted March 24, 1941.

Woods tried for cadet training and just missed. He then hit the books and got accepted at officer's candidate school. After nine months training, he graduated from Tuskegee Army Air Field in Alabama in August,

1942, joining the 332nd Fighter Group, 100th Fighter Squadron.

"Sixty-one in my class started, and 23 made it," Woods said. Three fighter squadrons and one medium-bomber squadron comprised the entire African American presence in U.S. cockpits during World War II.

Woods piloted the venerable P-40 Warhawk made famous by the Flying Tigers, then the less storied P-39 Aircobra before moving up to the big leagues of single-seat fighter combat: the P-47 Thunderbolt and P-51 Mustang.

Many of his combat missions were flown over the Italian coastline, supporting Allied ground forces around Rome. In the fall of 1944, he was flying a Mustang, painted with the 332nd's trademark red tail, spinner and wing bands, and the 100th Fighter Group's signature black trim tabs. While beating up the enemy air base at

Athens, Greece, his plane was crippled by ground fire. That's when he sustained his only injury of the war, a sprained ankle.

Woods endured his first solitary confinement on his way to a German Air Force Stalag southeast of Berlin. The confinement was to "soften him up" for his first interrogation, Woods said, made during the three-week nightmare trip by train, truck and plane to the Stalag. Woods was there for the duration, sharing barracks crammed with 10,000 Allied prisoners, sleeping the brutal German winter nights in beds stacked three high.

He was liberated in the spring of 1945, by Patton's 3rd Army during the Battle of the Bulge.

To contact reporter Joe Dunlop, please call 244-3400, ext. 256.



Associated Press

Carol and Paul King, sister-in-law and brother of Preston King, stand in front of the old King family home in Albany, Feb. 9. Preston King fled to England in 1961 to escape a draft-dodging conviction, which he claims was based on racism and now the U.S. Justice Department is reviewing.

Scholar who fled draft seeks amnesty

ALBANY — In the annals of the civil rights movement, Preston King isn't even a footnote. But to his family, he is an unfinished chapter.

In 1958, the local draft board refused to extend King's deferment to pursue his education. He had been granted time to get a master's degree at the prestigious London School of Economics and Political Science. But now, ready to pursue a doctorate, he was told to report for induction.

King, who is black, refused, accusing the all-white board of racism.

His proof? The board secretary's insistence on addressing him by his first name in correspondence — and a couple centuries of history.

In 1961, King was convicted of failing to report and was sentenced to 18 months in federal prison.

The young man who had said he hoped to become a U.S. diplomat instead began a life outside the United States as a fugitive. He fled the country and, for the better part of four decades, has not dared return

— even for the funerals of his parents and brother.

Today, the ambitious youth from this small south Georgia town is a renowned political philosopher and author in England, where his daughter, Oona King, is a member of Parliament.

Last year, she showed up in Georgia with a BBC television crew and instantly put her father's long dormant case back on the front burner — and Albany's segregated past on trial.

The file of King's trial had long ago been packed away, the hopeful 20-year-old face on his passport photo stamped "CANCELLED." But now, the U.S. Department of Justice has ordered a copy to review.

Oona King and her American relatives are using her clout to push for a presidential amnesty. And so today's justice system has been called upon to decide whether King was a legitimate protester rejecting generations of humiliating denigration or just a spoiled academic who played the race card.

Black History Month Can Bring Us Together

February marks America's particular attempt to recognize the contributions of black people to our collective history.

This very important effort features education programs, work projects, seminars, celebrations and a considerable amount of sober reality.

The fact is, for much of this nation's history, African Americans have been undervalued and disrespected — legally, economically and socially. Within that terrible framework, the efforts of black people to build communities, families and this country have also been ignored. That is why the month of February is not about "setting aside" a time for a minority group, but rather an opportunity to for each of us to understand that the differences which often divide us can also unite us.

Americans love the story of the underdog who succeeds despite terrible odds. This month will feature hundreds, thousands of such stories.

Americans accept that this is a nation of laws and that justice can be found in our legal system. This month, people have a chance to see that the history of black people in America does not include the assurance that the law treats everybody equally. And, those wounds are deep. At the same time, from the establishment of the 14th Amendment's guarantee of equal protection under the law for all people, to the long-overdue Supreme Court case outlawing segregation in public schools, to the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Americans of all colors have been able

to find an opportunity for justice. The system is not close to perfect, but history affords us some reason for hope of a better world.

Finally, Americans are united by their love of excellence. Be it math, science, innovation, athletics or music, there are thousands of brilliant and gifted black people who have contributed mightily in their chosen fields. But, much of the discussion about those efforts will be limited to this month.

In looking at one well-known area, sports, the message of this month becomes clear. The contributions of African Americans to the world of sports is overwhelming, and provides an excellent model for future discussions of American history. It is inconceivable that a history of the NBA would not be dominated by tales of Chamberlain, Russell, Robertson, Erving, Johnson and Jordan. It could not possibly be a set-aside chapter, it is central to any meaningful narrative.

If we are successful in our efforts to ignite interest and understanding through Black History Month, it will become less necessary over time. The lessons will have been learned and advanced. Our diversity and our individual identities deserve respect, but we must also work to move within them and closer together.

Until that day comes, and we believe it will, we applaud the efforts of all those people who work to make this month special.

And, we nod in gratitude to all those who toiled in obscurity or under painful servitude to help bring us to this moment in our shared history.

The Unresolved Death Of Willie Williams

Now that the proverbial smoke has cleared, it's time for me to revisit the Willie James Williams case. And no, I'm not trying to "beat a dead horse to death."

If I had my druthers, and I do, I'd rather beat a horse that's already dead than kill one that's alive.

I'm also aware that many in the community consider Mr. Williams' case "closed."

Of course, these are some of the same folks who would rather sweep dirt under the rug and hide their heads in the sand rather than admit all is not perfect in Winnersville.

I realize that law enforcement is a dangerous occupation. It is also my understanding that the majority of our local law enforcement officers are highly competent, polished professionals.

But even so, Mr. Williams is still dead and the real "truth" surrounding his death remains

unresolved. The reason his death remains unresolved may be considered by different possibilities.

Arrogance of power is one of the possibilities to be considered. Some officials don't like anyone questioning their authority.

Sheriff Ashley Paulk threatened to arrest peaceful, law abiding citizens who marched on and rallied at the Lowndes County Law Enforcement Complex on Sep. 19.

Though the sheriff had the opportunity to personally speak at the rally, he resisted all efforts to show any hint of remorse concerning Mr. Williams' death.

Not only did the sheriff seem to have no regrets, he and other public officials summarily dismissed Mr. Williams' death as an "accident," even before the official investigation was completed. Their position was that business would continue as usual in our present moment of existence and into the upcoming millennium . . . without interruption.

I don't know about anyone else, but it is very disturbing to me when an "accidental" death

becomes a normal part of law enforcement's regular, prescribed routine.

Then there was the coroner's jury, whose actions were rubber-stamped by the grand jury. The coroner's jury was a forum where the public was invited to attend and play the role of the unwanted, but necessary window dressing.

Those in attendance weren't even provided a TV monitor and allowed to view the video of Mr. Williams' arrest.

But beyond that, why did the coroner provide information directly to a news reporter stating the finding of the jury was "unanimous" when the decision was actually split along racial lines?

Did the coroner sleep through the proceedings and is this the reason he never asked one single question of any witness?

No, I'm not trying to be facetious or embarrass anyone. I'm only making a point.

My point is this: if the coroner wasn't paying attention to the details of the proceedings in an open public forum, then why would any skeptic believe the grand jury could ensure

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Charles Moore
Mailbox Post Columnist

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justice behind the closed doors of a secret proceeding?

Some of you may have a viewpoint which opposes mine. Then too, at least two city councilmen have asked me, "Why did Floyd Rose have to march on city hall?"

The first words to pop in my mind were, "Why not?" There is nothing illegal about marching on city hall, is it?

However, another reason the truth behind Mr. Williams' death remains unresolved is possibly because of the community's desire to remain in a "don't-rock-the-boat" comfort zone.

In other words, anyone who would rock the boat will be labeled a troublemaker.

This means that the biggest troublemaker of all is Church of Christ Minister Floyd Rose.

Whether anyone disagrees with his tactics or dislikes him personally, Minister Rose must be given credit as the very first person to reach out to others in

an attempt to find justice concerning Mr. Williams' death.

On different occasions, he invited local politicians, business leaders and members of the clergy to luncheons.

Other than former State Senator Loyce Turner and a few clergy members, everyone else went into their "don't-rock-the-boat" comfort zones.

When local politicians and business leaders refused to meet and break bread with Minister Rose, he organized and marched on city hall, the county commission and the chamber of commerce.

After marching on city hall and the county commission, Minister Rose then spoke directly to the Valdosta City Council and the Lowndes County Commission.

Not only did this make sense to me, it was a strategy which followed the path of logic.

Simply put, city hall, the county commission and chamber of commerce were put on

the "people's hot seat" because local power brokers wanted to remain within their comfort zones by maintaining the status quo.

And because the smoke has now cleared, we know that there was no economic boycott of white only businesses during the Christmas season.

On the other side of the coin, allegations of extortion have been levied against Minister Rose and the People's Tribunal.

There is one thing I can say with a degree of certainty. Throughout the entire Willie James Williams saga, Minister Rose has been more accessible and open than any public official or community leader, including Sheriff Paulk.

As things go, if the truth can't be uncovered within our system of justice, then "beating a dead horse to death" will never be considered an unjust or unfair action.

And with that, may your week be a thoughtful one.

Today's Inspirational Thought

"Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world." — I John 4:1

THE VALDOSTA DAILY TIMES

Jeffrey L. Heard
Publisher

Stephen T. Meadows
Managing Editor

Heard and Meadows join Juana Jordan, Brian Lawson, Edith Smith, Mae Stokes and Lou Ziegler of *The Valdosta Daily Times* and Greg Lofton of Valdosta on the newspaper's editorial board. "Our Opinions" are formed by that board.

► OUR OPINION

Black history vital to understanding U.S.

For some, Black History Month is a puzzle, a nagging reminder of sins past

or at least unnecessary in our modern world.

For others it is viewed as a kind of reverse racism. That position is generally behind the statement "What would they say if we had White History Month?"

Citing the gains made by African Americans, some argue that Black History Month is now unnecessary because American history is no longer divided by color. It is true that there are no more Jim Crow laws, discrimination on the basis of color is a federal crime and African Americans have far greater access to power and economic prosperity than at any time in our history.

But how did we get there? Who made these gains possible? Why wasn't it always this way? What was the political landscape that allowed this country to move from abolition to the back of the bus?

In the normal survey of American history, those questions tend to be footnotes interspersed with talk of tariffs and the War of 1812 and the New Deal. But they are central to our civilization and require special consideration.

In a normal survey of U.S. History there is no discussion of Mahalia Jackson, recognized as the greatest gospel singer ever. Christians around the world, regardless of color, listen to her music and feel the majesty of God. But it takes a month like this to remember what it was like for her trying to travel from concert to concert in the South of an earlier era.

In her autobiography she describes performing in front of mixed race audiences and noting the thunderous applause transcended the color of the audience.

But after the show things were different.

"From Virginia to Florida it was a nightmare. There was no place for us to eat or sleep on the main highways. Restaurants wouldn't serve us. Teen-age white girls who were serving as car hops would come bouncing out to the car and stop dead when they saw we were Negroes, spin around without a word and walk away. Some gasoline stations didn't want to sell us gas and oil. Some told us no restrooms were available. The looks of anger at the sight of us colored folks sitting in a nice car were frightening to see.

"It got so were living on bags of fresh fruit during the day and driving half the night and I was so exhausted by the time I was supposed to sing I was almost dizzy."

So what? That's the past.

Again, why is it past? Who made things better? If part of our effort to understand the world means discarding bad ideas, it also means recognizing how good ideas develop. How humanity is embraced over hatred. How wisdom, allowed to flourish, defeats ignorance.

Yes, there are now African American professors at Harvard Law School. A Republican president who carried the South to get elected appointed Colin Powell as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Muhammad Ali, a pure lightning rod of controversy a generation ago, is now universally beloved as much for his courage as his charisma. Much of South Georgia is represented in Congress by Sanford Bishop, an African American elected in a majority-white district.

Things are different now. But we are not so changed that we can afford to ignore our collective history. That means recalling and learning from the great and shabby moments of our times. That means remembering Thurgood Marshall and Sojourner Truth and Shirley Chisholm and Marcus Garvey.

It means reconsidering the now-inconceivable story of a beloved, gifted Christian woman couldn't sit down to a decent meal in the Bible Belt because of what she looked like.

It means reconsidering the anger and bloodshed and sorrow and triumph of earlier days. It means taking those lessons and helping our children and our neighbors understand where we've been.

Hopefully, it means we're on our way to a better future.

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▶ OTHER OPINIONS

Here are excerpts from recent editorials in newspapers in the United States and abroad:

Feb. 6, *The Tallahassee (Fla.) Democrat*, on race study:

At the beginning of the century, historian W.E.B. DuBois described color as the major problem of the new century. Now ... his comment is almost an understatement.

That's why President Clinton's proposed \$10 million effort to quantify racism in America through a research program is such a good idea. ...

Racism's become a subjective term. ... Just as some blacks cry racism whenever life fails to go their way, some whites are just as quick to pooh-pooh what ... seem like textbook examples of unequal treatment to blacks. ...

It's a shame that we haven't reached a point where we could spend this money on concrete solutions. ... But if this research succeeds in accomplishing its highest goals, that \$10 million will be more than well-spent.

Commission Says No To Tribunal Review Board Request

By Suzanne Harris
The Mailbox Post

VALDOSTA — A spokesman for the People's Tribunal appeared before the Lowndes County Commission last week requesting that the county fund a citizen review committee.

The committee would "monitor and in some cases investigate cases of excessive force" and "document and report to the proper authorities and public all cases of excessive force."

Tribunal spokesman James Wright also requested "that the

medical treatment of suspects and persons confined in the county jail be reevaluated and addressed immediately." He also asked that Sheriff Ashley Paulk resign his position immediately and "class action civil damages be paid to all citizens who have exercised their right to assemble and petition the government and as a result suffered threats and defamation of their character."

Wright presented a complete outline to commissioners stating exactly what the Tribunal wanted included in the review committee.

Wright asked that the review committee be funded in the sheriff's budget.

"First of all, we cannot relieve or dismiss any constitutional officer," said Commission Chairman Inez Pendleton. "Secondly, we do not add things in the sheriff's budget that he doesn't want included."

Wright argued with the chairman and said he didn't understand why the county could not form a citizen review board because he thought the county had control over the sheriff.

"If we put something in his

budget he doesn't want, or if we, for example, didn't agree to give him the budget amount he asks for, it would go to arbitration," said Pendleton. "This happened once before and the county lost. It is most likely that we would lose again."

An arbitration process would bring in an outside party to decide whether or not the budget action was needed.

Wright then remarked there were funds the county has reportedly found which were thought unavailable. He asked why that money couldn't be used

to form a review board.

Lowndes County has recently discovered a \$20,000 surplus in the general fund due to under budgeting expenditures last year.

"Any extra funds the county may have would be used for county employee raises," said Pendleton. "Not to fund a citizen review board."

The county also tabled Tax Commissioner Paul Sumner's request for county retirement.

Sumner's formal request was first made to the commission

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Tribunal

Continued From Page 3

Dec. 16. and was approved by the commission. Later, Commissioner Mitchell Chaney said after thinking it through, he had changed his mind.

When commissioners were asked to approve the language change which would include Sumner in the retirement plan, the issue was tabled.

However, Chaney's vote was

not to include Sumner in the plan.

Pendleton said she wanted to look at the entire retirement plan because she said there were other issues in the plan she felt needed addressing.

Commissioner Joyce Evans supported the motion to table the issue.

Chaney voted against the motion. The current policy has been in place since 1975 with a revision in 1992 said County Personnel Director Mickey Tillman.

If Sumner does get county retirement approved, he will be the only full-time constitutional officer to have money directly contributed to his retirement fund.

Murder defendant talked of racial killing as initiation

JASPER, Texas (AP) — Dragging-death defendant John William King once talked about “taking a black out” — committing murder — as a way to get into a white supremacist gang, a former fellow inmate testified Thursday.

“To help new recruits get initiated, take somebody out and kill them. You have to spill blood to get in and give blood to get out, I guess,” convicted robber William Hoover testified, recounting what he says King told him while they were both in prison a few years ago.

King, 24, is the first of three white men to go on trial in the slaying of James Byrd Jr., a 49-year-old black man who was abducted last June, chained to a pickup truck and dragged three miles until his body was torn to pieces. King could get the death penalty.

It wasn't clear from Hoover's testimony about the prison conversation who would do the killing or what gang they were talking about. But prosecutors have said that King killed Byrd to gain credibility for a racist group he was organizing.

Hoover, 28, said the idea described by King was to abduct a black man, “kidnap him maybe, put him in the trunk of a car; take him out in the woods ... kill him” to “prove your loyalty to your organization.”

Prosecutors say King's idea nearly matches what happened to Byrd.

King was in prison for a burglary at the time.

In other testimony, defense attorneys suggested that King's many racist tattoos were a means

“You have to spill blood to get in and give blood to get out, I guess.”

— William Hoover
convicted robber

of helping him survive in prison.

Under questioning, the heavily tattooed Hoover said such markings are intended to show

solidarity with other white inmates and ward off attacks from blacks. “It does help to have close buddies like that,” he said.

Hoover joined the Aryan Brotherhood, a white prison gang. King joined the Confederate Knights of America.

Prosecutors have cited King's tattoos as evidence of a seething hatred of blacks. The tattoos depict such things as the lynching of a black man, Nazi-style SS lightning bolts and the words “Aryan Pride.”

Monday, February 22, 1999

THE VALDOSTA DAILY TIMES



Laurel Hahlen/The Valdosta Daily Times

Cook County ministers lead a 'March for Unity' Sunday through downtown Adel. The march was organized to bring blacks and whites in the community together.

Cold weather doesn't stop 'March for Unity' in Adel

By Laurel Hahlen
THE VALDOSTA DAILY TIMES

ADEL — Despite a biting, cold wind, temperatures in the mid 50s and a threat of rain, about 70 people turned out to show their support for the "March for Unity" Sunday in Adel.

The march was orchestrated to bring people of all colors together in a show of Christian unity, according to Deacon W.T. Sharpe of Bethel Missionary Baptist Church in Adel, who helped organize the event.

About 25 participants took a mile-long trek through the downtown Adel area singing traditional hymns. The group met up with around 50 additional supporters at the Cook County Health Department to listen to local ministers who stood before the crowd and spoke words of hope.

"The word 'unity' means agreement. In Cook County, Adel and the surrounding areas, all of us need to come together in peace, unity and love. This is

what we're here for today," said the Reverend Robert M. Jones, pastor of Bethel Missionary Baptist Church.

Jones said he felt the march was a success and would like to see it become an annual event.

The crowd, which was an even mix of blacks and whites, seemed to agree the purpose of attending the march was to demonstrate harmony and love.

"I'm here because I love Jesus and everybody and I don't look at color," said Hilda Tidwell, who came from Ray City to be part of the march.

Adel resident Mary Hayes agreed, "It's a good lesson for our children. How can we expect them to do it, if we don't?"

Several members of the Adel City Council, two mayoral candidates and police officials attended the event to show their support.

Even though their main reason for attending the march was to show unity, some residents participating in the event expressed concern that black members of the community are

not being treated equally with whites.

Marcher Frank Moody said the city still has many issues it needs to address.

"This town has made a lot of changes — but it's still not the way it should be. It's kind of like it's going backward instead of forward," he said.

Moody said he feels that since people of color make up 35 percent of the population in Cook County, they should be evenly represented in positions of authority.

Bob Jones also was concerned with unequal treatment in the community. Jones recently returned to Lenox after having been in other areas of the country for the past 44 years.

"I'm surprised a lot of things are still the same as they were," he said. "The street to the black cemetery is not paved, the one to the white cemetery is — that's not right."

To contact reporter Laurel Hahlen, please call 244-3400 ext. 237.

Community



Paul Leavy/The Valdosta Daily Times

The employee parking lot at the Valdosta Levi Strauss & Co. plant is empty after the company announced it was closing down the facility Monday.

Charitable agencies adjust to Levi's closing its doors

By Lowell Vickers Jr.

THE VALDOSTA DAILY TIMES

VALDOSTA — In addition to losing a major employer, the community lost an important corporate sponsor of local charities with Monday's closing of Levi Strauss & Co.

Levi's has been a generous supporter of United Way of Lowndes County, Lowndes Associated Ministries to People, the Boys & Girls Club of Valdosta Inc. and many other community organizations. For some agencies, Levi's was by far their most generous contributor.

"I hate it, not just because of the money but because of the caliber of company they are," said Angela Crance, executive director of the United Way. "They improved the lives of their employees and of the community."

Levi's support of charities will not end immediately, however. The company announced plans to continue support of some agencies.

Project Change, an anti-racism initiative created by Levi's, is expected to be funded indefinitely. Last year the Levi Strauss Foundation granted \$3.6 million to support Project Change over a five-year period at its four locations: Albuquerque, N.M., El Paso, Texas, Knoxville, Tenn. and Valdosta.

"The plant closing doesn't affect us at all," said Frank Morman, executive director of the local Project Change office.

Levi's spokesperson Brad Williams said other non-profit agencies will receive continued funding for the next three years, at similar levels.

Some agencies were unsure of the details Monday. Crance said she was confident Levi's would continue its annual corporate donation of \$10,000 to United Way. But the majority of the \$55,600 donated last year came from employees. Crance said she wasn't sure if Levi's would make up the difference.

Crance said she's also concerned about the welfare of the unemployed Levi's workers. Employees receive their normal pay for eight months, but after that some of the employees may

need assistance, she said.

However, Levi's has foreseen that possibility. The company has created a community transition fund, with up to \$5 million available to assist the communities affected by the 11 plant closures. The fund will provide grants for support services such as child care, food banks and counseling.

But many of the Levi's employees were unworried about the future. One group, members of the same church, left the plant in high spirits. They said the plant's closing was the will of God.

"We're rejoicing in the Lord and we know we're going to make it," Evangelist Peggy Stokes said.

To contact reporter Lowell Vickers Jr., please call 244-3400, ext. 246.

Building A Good Self-Esteem At An Early Age

I love to read. I also believe in building self-esteem in children who don't feel good about themselves.

And when reading and building self-esteem are combined, nothing can go wrong. Or can it?

Over a year and a half ago, Catherine Daughtery, a past Valdosta City School System teacher of the year, attended a reading workshop. After returning from the conference, one of her desires was to help build the self-esteem of her students.

The majority of students at Mrs. Daughtery's school are members of what society has labeled, the quasi-permanent underclass. As a reality, her students are viewed negatively by society at-large because of their economic status and genealogical history.



Charles Moore
Mailbox Post Columnist

This, of course, does nothing to help build their self-esteem. Many aren't satisfied with their skin color or hair texture.

Keep in mind children learn and model their lives by what happens to them environmentally; we must understand that their self-esteem is predicated on that which is beyond their control. In other words, children must be taught to love themselves.

The only other alternative is to teach them to dislike themselves. Whether we realize it or not, our idea of beauty and how we present this idea to children has a profound effect.

For example, nappy hair is not society's idea of what's beautiful. This also means that an overwhelming number of children have a negative view of nappy hair, including children who, themselves, have nappy hair.

At her reading workshop, Mrs. Daughtery was told that a book called "Nappy Hair," by Carolivia Herron, an African American and professor of English at Cali-

fornia State University at Chico, was must-reading for minority students.

The book, according to education professionals, would help build the self-esteem of minority children.

Mrs. Daughtery, who is white, asked if I would read the book to her kindergarten class.

That was over a year and a half ago. Last year, Ruth Sherman, a 27-year-old teacher at Brooklyn's P.S. 75, thought the book would build self-esteem among her black and Latino students.

Sherman, who is white, says that some parents threatened her life after she read the book to her third-grade class. She was removed from her classroom and temporarily transferred to a desk job.

Jill Nelson, in the January-February 1999 edition of Black Issues magazine, wrote: "Ms. Sherman may have been armed with good intentions, but in using 'Nappy Hair' in the classroom, she tapped into a well-guarded secret in a

community that is often under attack and has much to defend against and be defensive about."

Nelson added, "I suspect that the negative reaction to 'Nappy Hair' from parents, teachers and others springs from misinformation and embarrassment that this young white woman inadvertently exposed both the depth and absurdity of a race secret."

The depth and absurdity of a race secret? There's no doubt in my mind that the parents reaction to Sherman's honest efforts to help her students was immersed in a secret which is both deep and absurd.

If parents will react so strongly and negatively to unspoken truths, then how can children behave differently? Actually, they can't.

Along with other factors, self-hatred is probably one of the major reasons minority children have low self-esteem.

Perhaps Catherine Daughtery knew what Ruth Sherman didn't know.

And that is, she understood both the depth and absurdity of the secret surrounding nappy hair. This is probably why she asked me to read the book to her class instead of reading it herself.

Two weeks ago, I read the book "Nappy Hair" to Daughtery's class. It took us over a year and a half to get a copy of the book.

Her students, a multiracial group, absolutely loved the book. In fact, I've also read the book to several other classes.

Though it wasn't planned, I was fortunate enough to have parents in two of the classes during readings.

The reaction was the same: Everyone thoroughly enjoyed the message contained in the book, and, if I may add, liked how the message was delivered. As I said in the beginning, I love to read.

If reading can help build self-esteem, then why deprive children of such pleasure. And with that, may you also find pleasure and feel good about what you read this week.