

Student and Bus Driver Howard Timbers

I was born in 1948. I attended LCPS starting at Carver (1954 - 1963) and because I failed a couple grades, I attended Douglass High (1963 - 1965) and Loudoun Valley High School (LVHS) from 1965 through 1968. I attended Douglass High for my 8th and 9th grades from 1963 through 1965 and remember the coach announcing president John F. Kennedy's assassination to the class in 1963. When I went to Carver (1954 - 1963) my father worked on the Hoops Dairy farm in Purcellville and we lived in tenant housing on the farm. My older sister and I would catch the school bus driven by Henry 'Nuke' Reid. I would get off at Carver and she would continue on to Douglass High. Later we would ride O. Ray Stewart's bus to Carver and my sister would transfer to Mr. Reid's bus for the trip to Douglass. The buses were older with worn, uncomfortable seats and torn or missing rubber floor mats. There was also rust around their wheel wells and under carriage. It wasn't hard to notice the buses carrying white students were generally newer. The bus would pick up Black students living on other farms and along rural routes in the area. The route to Carver was primarily over dirt roads until we reached Purcellville. Those dirt roads were bumpy, narrow and very twisty in places. If we met oncoming traffic we would have to slow down and pull over onto the grass to allow the vehicles to pass one another. When the roads were dry, it would make for a dusty ride. If the weather was warm enough we'd have the bus windows down and the dust would flow throughout the interior of the bus. I noticed that some of the roads in front of white homes would have been sprayed with oil. That would keep the dust down from passing vehicles. Which probably also protected any laundry hung out to dry from the dust. I use to wonder where they got the oil? Mud from rain or melting snow on those dirt roads could make travel difficult as the bus driver strove not to get stuck. In some instances an alternate route had to be taken to avoid deep mud. In the winter the bus had chains to help get through the snow on those back roads. The route after my older sister and I were picked up was about 20 miles through the countryside around Purcellville to get to Carver. The bus was pretty full (80%) by the time we arrived at Carver. One year while attending Carver, I also served as crossing guard on my uncle, Ray Stewart's bus. I had a belt, badge and flag on a pole. When the bus stopped to let students on or off, I would get off first. I'd survey the traffic situation, and when it was safe, step into the road holding my flag out to alert any oncoming drivers that they should stop. Then the students would know that it was safe to cross the road. When the bus approached railroad tracks, I would get off, cross the tracks and look both ways. If there were no trains coming, I'd signal the driver and he'd drive the bus across the tracks, and pick me up. My uncle may have chosen me for that position, because by my later years at Carver (6th or 7th grade), I was older and taller than most of the Carver students on the bus. By my later years at Carver, and through high school, my family lived on the Myers farm near Short Hill Mountain outside of Lovettsville. Between 1963 and 1965 I attended Douglass High. I'd ride my uncle's bus to Carver and then transfer to Mr. Charlie Clark's bus for the ride to Douglass. Between 1965 and 1968 I attended LVHS and would ride the bus driven by Mr. Clark. I played Football while at Douglass. I ran track and wrestled while at LVHS. Though I'd ride to LVHS in a bus driven by a Black driver, our teams would ride an integrated bus for LVHS 'away' games. Though the bus was integrated, Blacks and whites generally sat with their own race. By my junior year, I was able to get my driver's license and also pass the test to be a school bus driver. I drove bus #68 during my junior year. It was a newer bus. My route covered 25 miles or so. I'd leave home about 7:15 AM, drive to Hillsboro, then to Round Hill and on to Purcellville making close to two dozen stops. Sometimes the bus was so full that some students had to stand. I would drop students at

Carver and then continue on to LVHS. Once while driving, the brakes failed on the bus. I wasn't going very fast and was able to use the emergency brake and steered into a shallow ditch running alongside the road to bring the bus to a halt before I reached a stop sign. I was praised for my quick thinking and driving skills. My mother would leave for work in Leesburg before I started driving my route. One morning in 1967, a teacher arrived at the house before I left to tell me my mother had been struck by a car in Leesburg. They arranged for another driver to take my route while I went to the hospital to check on my mother. Fortunately, she recovered from the accident. I took my bus driving responsibilities very seriously. I was not only responsible for safely driving students to school, but putting chains on the tires during winter snows. For that responsibility and being able to contribute a little to the family's finances, I felt proud.¹

¹ From October 26, 2020 interview with former LCPS Student Howard Timbers conducted by Nathan Bailey