

Student Louis Jett

I attended LCPS schools from 1956 to 1970. My family lived in the Black community of Willard when I started at Oak Grove Elementary (1956 -1958). We were forced to move when Willard was made part of the Chantilly airport which later became, Dulles airport. My family settled in Hillsboro (90% of the Black Willard families relocated to an area of Manassas known as Wellington). I attended the 2nd - 7th grade at Carver Elementary in Purcellville (1958 - 1962) and Douglass High in Leesburg (1963 - 1964). I finished my last four years of high school at Loudoun Valley High in Purcellville (1965 -1970). I rode an old bus to Oak Grove (generally Black students didn't get newer buses) over mostly dirt roads. When I lived in Hillsboro, the road in front of my home was too narrow for the bus to use so I'd walk from my house to the intersection of routes 812 and 718. There I'd catch bus #34 to Carver. O. Ray Stewart drove the bus to Carver and by this time, he'd been driving Black students to school since 1949. He was also a janitor at Carver. The route to Carver was over dirt and paved roads with the paved section being the 5 miles of route 690 between Hillsboro and Purcellville. The bus would be about 3/4 full (approximately 20 students) by the time it got to Carver. When I moved on to Douglass High (1963-1964), I'd still catch the #34 bus driven by O. Ray Stewart into Purcellville. At Carver, I'd transfer to a bus driven by Drew Gaskins. Drew was also a mechanic for Loudoun County and would drive us into Leesburg where I'd disembark at Douglass High. The road between Carver and Douglass was all paved. In 1965 I switched to Loudoun Valley High. Once we got on route 690 it was all paved roads to Loudoun Valley High. Integration at Loudoun Valley High had started a few years earlier, and yet I continued to ride a bus with a Black driver and only Black students. The dirt roads in my area could get pretty bad particularly Allder School road (route 711). When the road was muddy the school bus tires would sink 8 - 10 inches in the mud. The bus driver would speed up to get through the mud puddles. I never rode a bus that got stuck in the mud or had an engine break down. When I started at Loudoun Valley High, some students would still call Blacks, 'Niggers'. In fact, I passed up try-outs for the football and baseball teams, because I would have been the only Black on those teams. I wouldn't have lasted a week being called 'Nigger' before they would have had to throw me off the team. I did join the wrestling team, partly because I was not the only Black on this team. We would take a school bus to 'away' meets at places like Front Royal, Winchester and Manassas. Athletic events like this were one of the few instances where Blacks and whites would ride the same school bus¹.

¹ From Sep. 15, 2020 interview with former LCPS Student Louis Jett conducted by Nathan Bailey