

Student Reggie Simms

I was born in 1935 and grew up in Purcellville. I attended the Purcellville Elementary school for Black students starting somewhere between 1942 and 1943. My birth date was beyond the cutoff date so I had to wait an additional year, but was somewhere between 5 & 7 years old when I started. Our home was just 3 or 4 houses down from the school on 20th street, so I walked to Purcellville Elementary and then to Carver Elementary. The two schools were close to one another. While at the Purcellville Elementary school I was diagnosed with tuberculosis by the school nurse. She was a white woman who would conduct wellness checkups at the schools. I was admitted to a hospital in Farmville, where I would spend two years recovering. I was in a ward with other Black children and there were older, high school age children there too. We weren't provided any teaching while we were on the ward. So basically, I fell two years behind my classmates. By the time I was released, Purcellville Elementary had closed and Carver Elementary had opened (1948). I attended Carver for two years and then attended Douglass High in Leesburg. When I attended Douglass I would take the #16 bus driven by then student, Norman Brooks. Norman lived in Upperville and kept the bus at his home. His route would carry him from Upperville, east on route 50, north on route 611 through St. Louis and on to Purcellville by way of Guinea Bridge Road, picking up students all the way. I boarded the bus along with other Black students in Purcellville. From there the bus would go east on route 7 through Hamilton to Leesburg where we'd disembark at Douglass High. I graduated from Douglass in 1955. I don't remember much about the bus; it was an older bus (Blacks typically didn't get the newer buses). Norman kept the bus clean and in good repair and I recall he single handedly maintained order on the bus. All the time I rode the bus it never broke down (engine trouble or flat tire). Because the 9 or 10 miles between Purcellville and Leesburg were paved, it never got stuck in mud or snow. Some of the area between route 50 and Purcellville was not paved. By the time we arrived at Douglass High, the bus was pretty much full. I played Baseball and Football in high school. The county provided buses for our 'away' games, but the bus would return to Douglass and you had to find your own way home. Generally, I'd hitchhike. Our 'away' games carried us to other Black high schools in Manassas, Winchester, Berryville, Merrifield and Charleston, WV¹.

¹ From Sep. 30, 2020 interview with former LCPS Student Reggie Simms conducted by Nathan Bailey