

Who Am I? by Erwin Jacobs

As this story unfolds, it spans over fifty years of my recollections of one of the most popular Lumbee Indian men of his time here in Robeson County, North Carolina. He was generally known by thousands of young Lumbee students simply as "Mr. Elmer." I need not elaborate on this man's identity as many years he helped to guide and I must say was very instrumental in changing the paths of hundreds, maybe thousands of young Lumbee students who passed through the doors of "Old Pembroke High School," which still stands as a monument to us for many years. This brick building, if its walls could talk, would not need anyone to write about its alumni (students) who received their education from grades 8-12 before the population outgrew its size.

While in Grammar School I attended a small school in the area of Harpers Ferry Baptist Church. This school started out as one room, if my recollection serves me right, then two rooms, finally four or five rooms, teaching students from grades one through seven. Then students would be bussed across the Lumbee River, approximately three or four miles to the edge of Pembroke to attend Pembroke High School. Harpers Ferry Elementary School is just a memory for all of us who attended our grammar years of school there. My earliest teacher was a lady from the Fairmont area whom we called "Ms. Pheila." Ms. Opheila Hunt taught many years and I am sure she taught all ten of my mother's children through the years. She became the wife of the Rev. Fuller (D.F.) Lowry and lived to a ripe old age, having passed away a few short years ago, as I recall.

The first principal I remember was Mr. Norman Boynes (Boins) who died from a self-inflicted gun shot wound, as I remember. Mr. Tom Oxendine, I recall was a very good principal. He loved games of soft and hard ball. I can still hear him yelling Hot-Tot-Tada-La and Home Run Katy Bell as a student would hit a home run playing soft ball. Mr. James Fuller Lowry was our principal a few years, as well as Mr. Xnephon Oxendine. I could have missed someone else, but Mr. Alford Oxendine was my last elementary principal.

I lived far enough from the school to ride the Indian school bus to Harpers Ferry. Then the bus would continue across Harpers Ferry Bridge to Pembroke Graded School, and finally to Pembroke High School. During this time is when I had my first experience with Mr. Elmer Lowry. When my bus driver would have a ball game, Mr. Elmer would drive his bus for a day or maybe one way so the driver wouldn't miss the ball game. I do not know for sure how many years Mr. Elmer was principal at Pembroke High School, but it was all through my school years.

In Mr. Elmer Lowry's younger years he had an eye injury which left a blood spot on his eye. That had a terrible effect on me as he would look toward the school bus door as he would open the door he had to look down and ask us kids to step up into the bus and find a seat. I will never know what would happen to me, but it was as a shock would come over me until I would get off the school bus. It was a scared feeling I would get and the rest of my school years I couldn't shake that feeling. Mr. Lowry was a good man but very stern when he would speak. He would treat all of us students the same way and if we needed a punishment it did not matter if we lived in Pembroke, from Union Chapel or across Lumber River (Harpers Ferry, Rowland or Maxton area). Everyone was treated equally and fairly. Mr. Lowry had no picks or pets as far as I could see. He was stern but fair in his punishments. While in the eighth grade we had a box supper to raise a little money. I remember a certain girl had a box supper that I was very interested in but did not have the money to bid on her box. Mr. Elmer told me to bid and he would pay for the box. Well, I got the supper and enjoyed it that night. That's the kind of man this writer remembers. As he would occasionally walk up to me and start a conversation, he would reach up and start pulling one of my ears gently. Mr. Lowry I'm sure did not realize the effect it would have on my alter ego, it would cause chills to run up and down my spine. Mr. Elmer knew my family and knew the poor life I grew up in before I reached the eighth grade. He knew my two older brothers who served in World War II.

He often urged us students to stay in school and get a good education. We were not that bad (the class of 1953) but there was something going on all of the time to cause our teachers to send many of us to the principal's office (which we dreaded to have to face Mr. Elmer). I remember having to hand in a paper after a test in Mrs. Ruby Dial's English class. We had to read our paper in class. Jack (Bracey Felton Lowry) was asked to read what he had written on the test. His writing was so scribbled he couldn't read it but Mrs. Ruby gave him a grade on it to pass. Jack is today a Judge in Tennessee. Many of my classmates became educators, some became professors, others retired from the military and of all the professions that different ones acquired I'm sure Mr. Elmer played a very big part in helping everyone achieve it.

After my junior year I enlisted in the U.S. Navy to help my mother have a better livelihood. Also I wanted to have a much better life as the times were hard for me because my last two summers trying to earn enough money to buy clothes, shoes and school supplies to finish my senior year. I was joined in Boot Camp out in the desert near San Diego California by several of my classmates and others from Pembroke High School. Many of these guys returned to Robeson County to complete their education and go make a better life for themselves. As for me when I served four years active duty I came back and continued on to Bayville, NY seeking employment in the electrical printed circuit profession in Glen Cove, NY, then marriage. I was required to do four

years Reserve at which time I could return to active duty. I received my Honorable Discharge in June, 1960. As I journeyed back to Robeson County to visit my mother and my wife's family, I had one priority that was next on my agenda, that was

to pay a visit to Mr. Elmer in the Hopewell area. His son, E.T. and my son, Rickey, would run and play as I would visit with Mr. Lowry and Mrs. Vera. It was during these visits that it would hit me how much Mr. Elmer cared for me. During my sophomore year at Pembroke High School Mr. Elmer taught us Algebra. We had a set of rules we would have to memorize and recite to our class at times during that school year. As it would be my turn to stand up as Mr. Elmer called my name, I would look at him and my mind would go blank, even though I had just recited it to my classmate Lycurous Lowry. Thus this story unfolds, the man that could make me forget.

There is not a time I cross the railroad tracks on Elrod Road in the Hopewell area that as I look to the south side blue graded house, hoping to see but know it is impossible that I would glimpse Mr. Elmer out in the yard. Mr. Elmer, Mrs. Vera, E.T., as well as my son, Rickey, are only memories now.

Recently my class, the class of 1953 met at the old Pembroke High School Auditorium to celebrate our 50th reunion which I have mentioned from time to time in my articles. As we gathered to celebrate and remember our deceased classmates, we all paused to hear the rustle and bustle of a bygone era of young feet and laughter of the students rushing from one class to the other, hoping not to be stopped by Mr. Elmer for being too noisy as we rushed to our next class. Mr. Elmer's presence was felt by everyone as we remembered those days many, many years ago at "Old Pembroke High" and the man who changed our lives as we traveled the halls of this much loved and respected old, yellow brick building adjoining the University of North Carolina, Pembroke. It is good that many people rallied to save this historic building as it is still serving as an educational institution. As one enters the front door to the right still sits Mr. Elmer's principal office, also his portrait is hanging on the wall, reminding us he is still watching up to make sure we are behaving ourselves.

As the story continues, it is the evening of Friday, July 4th and the PHS class of 1953 is gathering in the auditorium for our 50th class reunion. As I enter the school house I see that there are a lot of renovations taking place. I look for Mr. Elmer's huge photo that has hung outside of his principal's office for a number of years. It is missing from its spot looking down from the hallway. I see the custodian on duty and inquire what has happened to Mr. Lowry's painting. He assured me that it was one of the last ones taken down for the extensive work going on renovating the inside of the school building. As he searched a few rooms, he retrieved the picture. I asked if he would place it in the auditorium as he was our beloved principal and it would be proper for him to be looking down on us as we gathered for this 50th reunion. He graced our presence on a stand behind the podium as we gathered for the evening's activities, watching over us as he had in our high school years from the 8th grade to the senior year of 1953. When our class graduated in 1953, I was on a war ship, the U.S.S. George Clymer APA 27 in the Far East of Asia, serving my country in the U.S. Navy as several others of my class mates were also in the U.S. Military. Some retired while others came back to finish their education.

The class of 1953 was the largest class at the time to attend PHS since its beginning. Many classmates went on to be educators, one Bracey Felton (Jack) Lowry excelled in life to become a judge. Several others became professors, some became ministers, others became officers in the military. I saw Jasper Ivey tonight for the first time in over fifty years. He retired as a Chief Warrant Officer.

We had three of our former teachers share moments with us, Mr. Ronald Lowry, Mr. Thomas Oxendine, Jr. and Mrs. Lucy Oxendine. Mr. Tom and Ms. Lucy shared a few moments talking about their teaching experience with our class. It was good to see Mr. Oxendine. We had talked

by phone when I lived in Baltimore, MD. But I had not seen him in over fifty years. He was the first Native American (Lumbee) Aviator (Pilot) in the military. We have now one Rear Admiral (Admiral Charles Holmes) serving our country. To my knowledge, Rear Admiral Holmes is the highest ranking Lumbee to serve in our military of the USA. He hails from the Saddletree area over near Lumberton, NC.

As the old saying goes, the night is getting late, the oil is getting low, so I will continue the story later on! The week end has passed. The activities surrounding Lumbee Homecoming was a huge success. Hundreds, maybe thousands poured into the Town of Pembroke to see relatives and friends. It is good that our 50th class reunion coincided with this time of celebrating. There were a few of my friends especially the ones who were in the Navy Basic Training at San Diego when I was there, Mr. Clifton Hammonds and others while we were in the Orient spending a few liberty hours together I would have been delighted to have seen at the reunion.

All in all, everyone had a wonderful time and it did feel good knowing Mr. Elmer was there looking down on us making sure we behaved ourselves. But we were so glad to see each other this our 50th year class reunion. May God bless you all!



Erwin Jacobs is shown with the painting of former principal Elmer T. Lowry which hangs in the historic site, Pembroke High School.



Mr. Thomas Oxendine, Jr. and Erwin Jacobs. Mr. Oxendine was one of our teachers.



Earl B. Chavis, Narva Lowry, Maynor Lola M. Dial catching up on the latest news!



Ms. Lucy Oxendine, one of our teachers and portrait of Mr. Elmer T. Lowry.

Pembroke Native advances to Junior Olympic Games

CHARLOTTE-Pembroke native, Aminah Ghaffar claimed the Region 3-A AAU Championship in the long jump over the weekend, competing in Charlotte. Region 3-A includes North Carolina, Tennessee and Alabama.

Ghaffar, who competes in the eight and under age group, jumped 10'4" on a windy cool day to win. It was her shortest jump of the season, but good enough to win.

The Pembroke Elementary School student advances to the AAU Junior Olympic Games in Detroit, Mich. for a chance to claim the national title in the long jump. Earlier, she claimed the state AAU title with a jump of 11'2," which ranks her fourth in the nation.

Ghaffar has also qualified in the 100-meter run, 400-meter run and long jump for the USA Track and Field Eastern Regionals held in Landover, Maryland.

Twelve girls competed in the competition this weekend. Six from North Carolina and six from the Alabama/Tennessee. The Junior Olympic Games begin July 24.

Aminah jumps Wed. July 30.



A portrait of Mr. Elmer T. Lowry, principal, looking down on us as he did from the 8th grade through the senior year, 1953.

American Buffalo join the show at Dolly Parton's Dixie Stampede

MYRTLE BEACH, SC- Dolly Parton's Dixie Stampede Dinner & Show in Myrtle Beach has a thrilling new opening featuring the addition of some bold new cast members...six tons of American buffalo leading the stampede nightly. A herd of buffalo kick-off the fun-filled. All American entertainment experience which also includes horses, ostriches and racing pigs in a 1,000-seat arena.

"The buffalo herd gives the audience a real connection to America's past," Parton said, "when vast herds of buffalo roamed the plains. I can't think of another creature that's such a strong symbol of our nation's great strength and freedom. We added the Buffalo stampede to give folks a little more excitement and a bigger taste for America."

Parton conceived the idea for adding buffalo to the popular attraction during her European tour on behalf of her latest CD, "Halos and Horns," which was nominated for a Grammy in

2002. Dolly Parton's Dixie Stampede offers two shows in one-a one-of-a-kind Carriage Room pre-show and a full-scale arena spectacular with a fabulous four-course feast. Dixie Stampede, "Myrtle Beaches Most Fun Place to Eat" is a musical extravaganza centered around an elegant Southern barbeque where horse-drawn carriages bring belles and their gentlemen to the party in a stunning recreation of hospitality charm.

The regular season opened February 7th and runs through November 3rd. Christmas at Dixie Stampede runs November 7th through December 31st 2003. Admission is \$34.99 (plus tax) for adults and \$ 18.99 (plus tax) for children ages 3 through 11. The price includes four-course dinner, pre-show entertainment and the full-scale main arena spectacular.

For more information and reservations, call Dixie Stampede at (843) 497-9700, toll-free (800) 433-4401

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