

CAROLINA INDIAN VOICE

VOLUME 33 NUMBER 3

THURSDAY, JANUARY 20, 2005

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Dr. Martin L. Brooks, recipient of Order of the Medicine Wheel Award: his story

by Dr. Ruth Dial Woods

Martin Luther Brooks was born the first son of Peter Brooks and Attie Mae Cummings in Detroit, Michigan in 1929. The advent of the Great Depression led the family and the first four of their eleven children back to their homeland of Robeson County in 1932 to the Union Chapel Community. This community served as an incubator of religion, education and leadership for Martin's early life. Growing up as a young man, he played a guitar and was often found praising and worshipping God in the local church and at family gatherings. The community school provided him with opportunities for competition and mental stimulation where he excelled in mathematics, science and music. According to Martin's childhood stories, "Mr. Pete," as he was affectionately called, was responsible for the first school bus for Indian students in Robeson County. A retired body of a bus was transposed on a flatbed and ran a route to pick up students for school. Martin's job was to keep order on the bus, his first opportunity for leadership.

Martin remembers how his mother and father stressed the importance of education. After eating supper at the family table, covered with oilcloth, the table would be cleared and "Mr. Pete" would call all of the children to the table with their books and sitting at the head of the table, supervised their homework. It was only after chores and homework had been completed, that the family listened to the battery-operated radio to hear Gabriel Heater, the fights of Joe Louis, and the Grand Ole Opry. "Mr. Pete" had left Robeson County in the 7th grade to seek work in Detroit, Michigan, but returned to Robeson to claim his bride who had completed two years at the Indian Normal School.

In 1935, the Brooks family moved to the Bear Swamp Community. Martin grew up among the religious "giants" including Lonnie Jacobs, Tommy Swett, Jim Maynor and Venus Brooks while attending Bear Swamp Baptist Church. His grandparents, James and Celester Maynor Cummings and Sandy and Effie Jones Brooks, were pillars of the community and their role in the extended family provided support and encouragement as well as high expectations. Martin did not falter, and at Pembroke High School, he met other moral and educational challenges from Mr. Elmer T. Lowry, Mr. Bennie Sampson, and Mrs. Ruby Dial. His years in the Pembroke schools were golden years of finding keys to knowledge and wisdom that provided the foundation for intellectual pursuits beyond high school. He received all six of the academic awards in 7th grade, and the highest academic award for scholarship in the 8th, 9th, 10th and 11th grades at Pembroke High School. Martin was a member of the Boy Scouts of American Troop 27 in Pembroke with legendary Scoutmaster Walter Pinchbeck.

Two major events that occurred in his early life led Martin to consider the study of medicine. On the occasion of the birth of one of his siblings, he witnessed the attending doctor slap the baby and heard the baby cry. Upon asking the doctor how he had done this, the doctor replied, "I worked doctor magic." The second motivation toward a career in medicine was experiencing the death of his mother at age 11 and his sense of helplessness in not being able to help her during her battle with cancer.

Martin realized that although he was academically gifted, he stood little chance of an opportunity to study medicine in North Carolina. Horace Paul of the Union Chapel community had tried to pursue such a career, but was turned down by all North Carolina institutions because he "was not 100% white." After the death of Martin's mother, "Mr. Pete," his father, knowing that Martin had potential encouraged him to go to Detroit and enroll in Cass Technical High School to study tool and die work so that he could make "a good living." Martin never enrolled at Cass Tech because the very day that he arrived in Detroit, his Uncle Leslie Cummings quickly took him to Ypsilanti where Althea, Martin's sister, and Lonnie Maynor, her husband, had recently moved. Martin was not allowed to live with the Cummings family. Upon completing the 11th grade at Pembroke High School, he moved to Michigan with the Maynors and enrolled in his senior year at Ypsilanti High School. He continued the same standard of academic excellence that he had at Pembroke during his senior year at Ypsilanti High School where he graduated as valedictorian of a class of 200 students while working 40 hours a week in the Kaiser-Frazier automobile plant. As a member of the Debate Club, he garnered the Michigan state award for speaking in a Declaration Contest sponsored by the Ypsilanti Kiwanis Club and he also participated in sports as a member of the cross-country team. Martin's outstanding academic record at Ypsilanti High School helped propel him into his lifetime desire to "practice doctor magic."

Martin's academic and intellectual abilities continued to manifest themselves as he enrolled at the University of Michigan. At the age of 18 the other 20,000 students enrolled there did not inhibit him. After eight years at the University of Michigan, Martin received his B.S., M.S. and M.D. degrees and graduated with honors among 182 fellow medical graduates. Each degree represented sacrifice, service, and selfless dedication to excellence in academic and professional achievement. Thirty-five years after the death of Dr. Governor Worth Locklear, the first Robeson County Indian licensed to practice medicine, Martin Luther Brooks was licensed in 1956 and came home to Robeson County to establish a medical practice where he continues to practice "doctor magic."

Martin was well received by the Indian community. He quickly opened his practice and began an affiliation with both Scotland County Memorial Hospital and Lumberton Hospital. Being the professional that he was, he quickly sought to establish himself with the American Medical Association. The process for membership in this professional organization required endorsements by the medical community at the local, state and national levels. Several weeks after filing for the process and initial endorsement at the local level, Dr. Lloyd Pate, practicing in St. Pauls, notified Martin that he needed to discuss some issues with him. A meeting held at the Lumberton Hospital revealed that the medical doctors of the area - Dr. Hugh McAllister, Dr. Horace Baker, Dr. John Lawrence, Dr. Roscoe McMillian and Dr. Robert Crooms - had all voted against an endorsement. It was Dr. Hugh McAllister who informed Martin that he had been involved in writing the by-laws of the association and that the by-laws had been written to keep the "niggers" out. The group advised Martin that he could become a scientific member and attend meetings, but he could not participate in social affairs of the association except as a guest of a member. Dr. Hugh McAllister offered to sponsor changes and to introduce a revision to the by-laws that would lie on the table for one year. Martin quickly advised the group that he would have to leave the area because he would not be covered with malpractice insurance and able to practice medicine as he had been trained. Jim Devane, current administrator of the Lumberton Hospital, took a stance and advised the medical society that "Martin Brooks will practice in Lumberton Hospital." Determined not to be outdone, Martin wrote to the State of Michigan for a copy of his birth certificate since he had been born there. It was this record, a Michigan birth certificate that indicated that Martin Luther Brooks was "white" forced the local medical society to endorse his membership and he received all other endorsements for full membership in the American Medical Society.

Martin admits that he was driven by achievement, intellect, and success. He perceived that he had developed a "sixth sense" in identifying the answers to the social ills that he found upon returning home. In his own words, his first "ego trip" was "a determination to 'fix' the Robeson County School System." He became an active member of an Indian Citizens Group organized to increase Indian presence in elective offices and to provide leadership in improving the quality of life of Indians in Robeson County. Martin Brooks, Herbert Oxendine, Vernon Ray Thompson, Ralph Hunt, Lester Bullard, Adolph Dial, Curt Locklear, Tommie Dial, and others brought a new social consciousness to Robeson County. They attacked double voting, they published a newspaper, they held community meetings, and they informed the people. Martin attributes his zeal to the proverb that "Where there is no vision, the people perish." While people did not understand the sacrifices and the contributions that these men made to the progress of Indian people in Robeson County, there is no question of the impact of their commitment and dedication to the Indians of Robeson County much later in this century.

Martin continued worshipping at Berea Baptist Church. While rearing his family of two sons and four daughters and carrying on a well-established medical practice, Martin continued using his "sixth sense" and remained active in advocacy, representation and leadership. He was appointed to the Board of Directors of the North Carolina Fund by Governor Terry Sanford, to the North Carolina Board of Higher Education before this Board was consolidated into the North Carolina University Board of Governors, to the Board of Trustees of Pembroke State College (now the University of North Carolina at Pembroke), served as Charter President of the Pembroke Kiwanis Club, and was a Charter member of the Board of Trustees of Lumbee Guaranty Bank.

Martin Luther Brooks quickly admits that he strayed from the God of his childhood as he sought to excel, to outperform, to achieve and to succeed. According to "his story," Martin allowed intellect to drive what he describes as "selfishness, self-centeredness, and perceived self-sufficiency." As a recovering alcoholic and a member in good standing of Alcoholics Anonymous for the past 26 and 1/2 years, Martin is a sought after speaker across North Carolina and the southeastern United States. He gives credit to "an all knowing and all loving God that is now his reality, and attributes the hope and help that he found through Alcoholics Anonymous as "helping me to recover from myself, to manage what I could not manage by myself, and doing together with others what I cannot do alone." Today, Martin retains membership in Berea Baptist Church and serves on numerous board and commissions that include: membership on the Board of Trustees of Lumbee Guaranty Bank and the only member who has served continuously from the inception of the bank, a member of the Board of Trustees and a member of the Steering Committee for the new Bed Tower and Heart Center of Southeastern Regional Medical Center, member of the Board of Directors of Renewal Center of the South, member of the Board of Directors and past chairman of the North Carolina Physician's Health Committee, member of the Board of Directors of Native American Interfaith Ministries (The Healing Lodge), and a member of the Board of the North Carolina Minority Health and Health Disparities Task Force.

Henry David Thoreau in Walden wrote - *If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer. Let him step to the music which he hears, however measured or far away.* Martin Luther Brooks has been a drum major. He has not always been understood. He has not always been appreciated. He has achieved, he has served, and he has overcome. He has touched the life of his people and his legacy and leadership will continue to give "hope for the hopeless and help for the helpless." This is Martin Luther Brooks' vision that he holds for his people.

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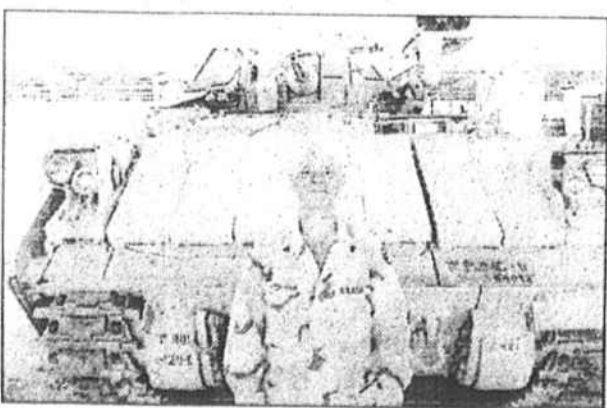


Dr. Martin L. Brooks



Shown left to right: Beverly Collins-Hall, Director of American Indian Mothers Inc. who presented the Order of the Medicine Wheel Award, Dr. Martin Luther Brooks, recipient of the Award; and Dr. Ruth Dial Woods, member Board of Directors of AIMI.

Welcome Home!



Welcome home to Sgt. Harnon Locklear Jr. and the rest of the HHC 1st 120th Infantry from your recent tour of duty in Iraq!

Tribal Council meets in special session

by Wanda Locklear, ITG Public Relations Director

Lumbee Tribal Council Speaker, David Carter called a special meeting of the Lumbee Tribal Council on Thursday night, January 6, 2005 at the Tribal Office.

Recent actions of the Tribal Council are a direct result of an earlier order issued by the Tribal Supreme Court directing the Tribal Council to take specific action which is as follows: To dismiss the Elections Board members due to neglect of duties. The dismissal of the Elections Board took place at a special called meeting on December 4th, 2004.

The following motions were made at the special meeting on January 6, 2004: Councilwoman Pearllean Revels' motion passed to allow the Tribal Council and Lumbee Supreme Court to deliberate over the decisions made concerning the Elections Board ruling. The purpose of this deliberation is to review the Tribal Constitution and discuss how to resolve the election process and determine if due process was given to the Elections Board.

A motion made by Tribal Councilwoman Louise Mitchell to resend all actions made by the Tribal Council at the December 20, 2004 meeting failed.

Tribal members are welcome to attend all Tribal Council meetings. At a typical business meeting of the Council, Tribal members are encouraged to share their questions, comments, and concerns. However, the December 6, 2005 meeting was a Special called meeting and David Carter, speaker of the Lumbee Tribal Council exercised his legislative authority to deny or allow someone to speak. Councilman Carter elected to address only issues of the Elections Board at this meeting.

The official opening of the Lumbee Tribal Office of Veterans Affairs was discussed as well as the continuation of the 2003 Audit.

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