

Opinion

The fabric of Bertie County since 1832

Remembering Frank Ballance...

To the Editor:

An Open Letter to Bernadine Ballance, her children, to 94-year-old mother Alice Ballance, and to all young leaders on the horizon:

It is with sobering dismay the invisibility with which the lack of media commentary has treated the life and recent death of former N.C. State and Senatorial Representative and U.S. Congressman Frank Ballance, Jr. (February 15, 1942 – February 22, 2019), elected historically in 2004 as the second African American to N.C.'s 1st congressional district. His political service spans from 1983 to 2004.

Frank served with public distinction, "in an otherwise blameless life," until he fell victim to America's notorious two systems of justice: one for black and poor, another for white privilege and wealth. As recently evidenced in the controversial sentencing in Paul Manafort, Jr.'s court case for millions of dollars in tax and bank fraud for which Manafort pled guilty on several counts.

During Frank's political tenure, he was an impassioned leader for the poor and downtrodden assessing in the most personal way the economic needs, dreams and goals of his constituents.

His unrelenting activism in confronting the ever-polluting dehumanizing racial conditions and pressures concerning the loss of voting rights, environmental and health care rights, and an increasing prison pipeline ultimately cost him his freedom.

He served nearly a four-year federal imprisonment for "misuse of charitable dollars," which ultimately led to pursuing illnesses and his untimely death.

My highest hope for future young leaders, the bar is set for you as an invisible person, but Ralph Ellison said, "There is strength and ingenuity in invisibility."

Know the incarceration traps are laid. Be an urgent and political thinker, a passionate reader, a consummate writer; be a person of vision in the "light of truth." Recognize and give honor to the ancestors whose shoulders we stand on. We are counting on you.

Bernadine, no matter the unfair persecution you and your family have suffered or how wounded your enormous heart, Frank's enduring eulogy, of which you are most familiar, will be as a gatekeeper, a legal scholar, and a visionary and a philosopher for change.

Ending here as Frank so often did with a mighty selection of poetry from an outstanding black poet when closing a speech/lecture:

"And God stepped out on space...and said I'm lonely still...I'll make me a man..."
- The Creation by James Weldon Johnson (1871-1938)

Frank was God's man. He was our man. Always our, "Congressman-at-large."

Rest in peace dear friend. We won't forget. Our children and their children won't forget.

Your true character will be judged by the generations of family and friends left behind.

Gary R. Grant
Tillery

Doing good work at school...

To the Editor:

I had the distinct privilege to visit two elementary schools in Bertie County earlier this month - West Bertie and Aulander, respectively.

At both schools, the students were well-disciplined and attentive.

At West Bertie Elementary, I read to two first grade classes during Read Across America Week. The students were focused as well as good listeners.

Both schools were clean; the faculty, staff and students were respectful and exemplified love and concern for each other.

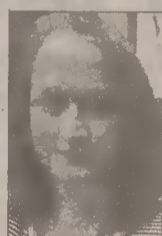
Continue to do the good work you are doing. Congratulations to you and the Bertie County Board of Education.

Coleen McGlone
Lewiston Woodville



Perseverance, class and courage...

I have had the privilege of meeting a handful of celebrities during my life. Some were actors, a writer or two.



SARAH H. STALLS
Wandering But Not Lost

There was Mr. Jimmy Hunter and there was this guy named Michael Jordan also.

However, few will ever stick in my heart and mind like the gentleman baseball player from Perrytown in Bertie County, Elder Lafayette White.

I met Mr. Elder and his wife, Mrs. Elaine, in their Ahoskie home nearly a decade ago. I still remember arriving that day. It was as if they were welcoming an old friend. Mr. Elder dismissed the importance of his story, but I was already intrigued.

Being a lifelong baseball fan and movie geek, it did not take me long to realize I was sitting down with a real-life Crash Davis.

Davis was the character portrayed by Kevin Costner in the baseball cult classic "Bull Durham." The character was inspired by the real-life story of Lawrence Columbus "Crash" Davis.

Born Dec. 23, 1933 in the Colerain suburb of Perrytown, Mr. Elder polished his skills while in

school and in Eastern North Carolina's county leagues.

"Every crossroads had a ball team around here," he told me. "Come Saturday and Sundays, everybody played ball."

Straight out of high school he was awarded a contract to play for the Coastal Plain League's Edenton Colonials. He cautioned me not to get too excited. The contract was for a \$150 a month. This was 1952, the only year there was a professional team in place in Edenton, according to Mr. Elder.

After his military service, he returned home to Bertie County and ready to play ball. He went back to the County League circuit where a Cleveland scout paid him a visit. From that a contract was signed and he headed to C ball in Fargo, North Dakota. Days before his bonus was due, he was released.

Perseverance had to be his superpower. He maneuvered the minors with a willingness to work. Timing was not on his side on a number of occasions. He played shortstop for the Pittsburgh club but who was playing at the major league level? MVP and Lou Gehrig Award Winner Dick Groat.

"I was traded to Chicago and who was playing shortstop?" I still remember Mr. Elder laughing

when he asked me.

"Ernie Banks. (One of three shortstops to be voted to Major League Baseball's All-Century Team in 1999). Yes. You gotta wait your turn," he said with a smile.

Mr. Elder got his "call to the show" in 1962. He recalled a plane trip to Houston when he got the nod as starting short stop that opening day.

One of his teammates was a guy you may have heard more about - Lou Brock.

With Pittsburgh, Mr. Elder became known for his pop-up slide. Apparently, a future hall of famer was watching.

"I taught Lou Brock how to slide," Mr. Elder told me that day, as if it were no big deal.

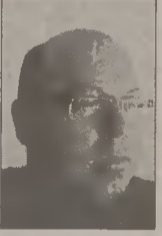
His career won't be mentioned in a rundown of the greatest players ever, but he will always be on my list of the best to play the game, probably because of what it meant to him.

When asked what his greatest career accomplishment was, he said meeting his wife.

Sarah Hodges Stalls is a Staff Writer for the Martin County Enterprise & Weekly Herald and the Bertie Ledger-Advance. She can be reached via email at shstalls@ncweeklies.com.

Everything hurts and I'm dying...

I was browsing the internet recently when one of many irritating pop-ups showed a T-shirt with the saying, "Everything Hurts and I'm Dying" on it.



JIM GREEN
Around Here

It was pretty funny, and I almost bought it - being I am at the advanced age where... you guessed it - everything hurts and I am dying.

Let me clarify my position.

I'm one day closer to dying, like everyone else is. I am not

trying to be morbid, just trying to point out the obvious, though I really try not to think about it.

The first part - Everything Hurts - is certainly true.

First of all, I do not like going to the doctor. I will battle through colds, sinus issues, hearing problems, even bronchitis and pneumonia, for as long as possible and won't go to the doctor until its gets unbearable.

Those ailments can usually be cured within a few days, but my latest issue has me a bit more

concerned.

My right arm has been sore, particularly around the elbow joint, for months now.

When I hold my arm straight out, it hurts.

When I try to rotate it, it hurts.

When I try to extend it - meaning, I attempt to reach for something on a higher plane - it really hurts.

It first started during the fall sports season, but I thought nothing of it.

It has continued through winter and the early part of this spring.

One day at a track meet, I explained my situation to a specialist, who suggested I make an appointment with her company.

I had planned to do so, but then I got busy. Here it is three weeks later and I still haven't gone to a doctor.

Some colleagues suggested I wear a copper bracelet on my right arm to see if it helps.

I did some research, and these things supposedly alleviate pain caused by tennis elbow, carpal tunnel and arthritis, among others.

This is the same pain I experi-

enced about 15 years ago in the same arm. Back then, a doctor friend of mine did some adjustments, and a few minutes later, I was fine.

It hurt, but I was fine.

I'm sure the pain is caused by two things: holding my camera with my right arm at an awkward angle for many years, and carrying around a heavy camera backpack (about 20 pounds) over my right shoulder certainly doesn't do that arm or shoulder any favors.

I want to try a copper bracket to see if it works. It may take a couple of weeks, but some who use them say they do.

The worst thing is they don't work and I am out a few dollars.

It's not I do not want to go to the doctor. Wait, yes it is.

I just would like to exhaust any other viable alternatives before I go run up some huge medical bill for them to tell me what I already know: Everything hurts, and I am dying.

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