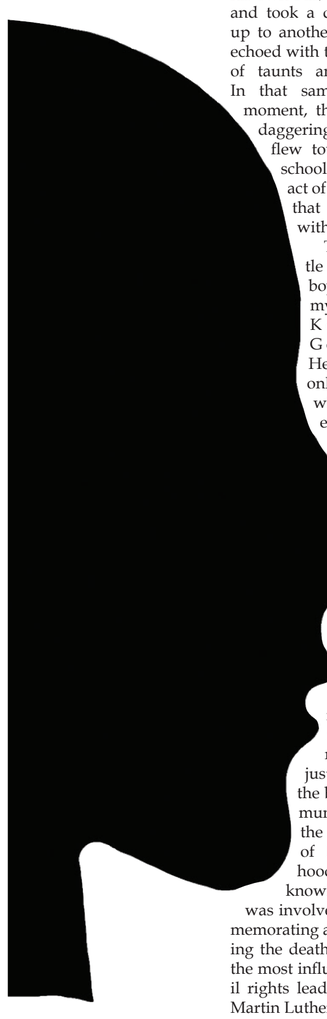
Student learns of dad's fight for Civil Rights

Sydney Goggans
A&E Editor



A tiny schoolboy was eager for the best part of his long, exhausting day of school — the bus ride home. Leisurely walking to his own bus, he paused and took a quick look up to another bus that echoed with the sounds of taunts and teases. In that same chaotic moment, the fluid of daggering saliva flew towards the schoolboy as an act of hate. Hate that fumed with racism.

The little schoolboy was my father, Kenneth Goggans. He was not only a man who experienced racism first-hand, but he was a man who fought and marched for equal rights and justice for the black community. Since the beginning of his childhood without knowing it, he was involved in commemorating and honoring the death of one of the most influential civil rights leaders — Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

"In 1968, we were at school, I was in the third grade and the school wanted to march and commemorate Martin Luther King Jr. for what he had done. We sung songs such as 'We Shall Overcome.' We had speakers made up of teachers, the principal and the people from the community. It was devastating to me because everyone was crying or singing and it made me want to cry. I knew about Dr. King because my parents talked about him and you would see him on TV," Goggans said.

When my dad grew a little older in age, his mother took him to the dentist in a different county from where they grew up. As they went to that dentist more and more, the Goggans family came to a discovery of the the mistreatment that was bestowed upon them, unlike the whites at the dentist office.

"When we had a toothache or cavity, my dentist would pull our [teeth] and we thought that was normal," Goggans said. "But we found out he was pulling our teeth while he was filling the white kids' teeth. These were our permanent teeth, not our baby or primary teeth. I have a bridge in my tooth as a result of him pulling my teeth."

His parents were hardcore rebels when it came to black pride and black power. In the early '70s, the dentist's office was still embedded with segregation: "white door" and "black door." Goggans' dad, mother and siblings did what some would call one of the most courageous ways of protesting — the sit in. As a 10-year-old boy, he was scared of the outcomes, but the defiance of his mother made him brave and face whatever reactions would come their way.

"I remember my mom saying, 'This don't make no sense; it's the '70s and the dentist still has colored on this side of the door and whites on the other.' We went to the white's side and they were looking at us like we were garbage. The receptionist never said a word to us and never called our names. Even when all the white patients had gone through, they just acted like we were never there and we sat there for two hours. My dad came and got us and we went home, but my mom was fed up with that mess," Goggans said.

> "I'm pro-black, I felt pro-black and I had the need to advance the black cause and I still feel that need today. It would upset me to think about what our ancestors, my parents, my grandparents and myself had gone through. I just thought in some formal way, protesting was the least I could do while I was in school. It's all based on what my mama and dad did and they weren't afraid to confront things that were not right."
> Kenneth Goggans

Montgomery was the common city for the Goggans family to shop. Growing up in a small town, they ventured off to the city to explore their downtown. Every outing to Montgomery consisted of fiery marches and protests led by churches, the NAACP and even the KKK themselves.

"The KKK would stop traffic and give the white people brochures about joining the KKK," Goggans said. "I was scared and I remember my dad saying 'I'm gonna stop and see what these clowns got to say.'"

My dad's father knew what they wanted, of course. He put on a heroic armor to show my father to not be scared of the white-sheeted men. Bravery was an important characteristic for the family when they came upon uneasy situations, expecting the inferior to be hostile towards them.

"Cars that had black people just rode by. My dad rolled down the window and the [KKK member] bent over and saw that there were black people in the car. He then took his brochure and forcefully slung it inside our car," Goggans said.

My father's childhood was overfilled with experiences of racism, but he was alongside his parents. In his college years at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, he developed a mind of his own and his parents were not there every step of the way. His father had passed and his mother was hours away. His pro-black feelings continued to flourish and grow.

"Birmingham was a hot pocket of commemorations of things that happened," Goggans said. "I remember they were having a celebration of the 16th Baptist Church where the four black girls were killed in 1963 and I went and they had speakers such as Angela Davis. The church was filled with speakers that talked about trying to advance the black community, being pro-black and about the four little black girls."

As he lived in Birmingham from '80 to '84, he became involved in at least 15 marches for black equality. These included marches that involved injustice, memorials or celebrations. My father jumped at any chance to protest for the black community and offer support.

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My father felt the need to carry on my grandparents' legacy by standing up for what is right. He wanted to carry on the legacy, and his involvement in these protests led him to gain more knowledge of other civil rights leaders like Malcolm X. His goal is not only to influence me and the rest of my family to stand up for equal rights, but also for society.

"Every man, woman deserve equal rights. If there's a kink in the system, whether it be a black person or any other person, they deserve to be heard and their rights deserve to be met like everybody's rights should be met. No one is better than anyone else and if we see injustice or people being treated unfairly, it is our responsibility to address it," Goggans said.

HONORING THE JOURNEY

Speaker tells of his role in integrating Huntsville schools

Ania Stover
News Editor

Society has come far. Progress has been made.

That is what Sonnie Hereford IV told students in the Sparkman Learning Community in a recent visit to commemorate Black History Month. Hereford was the first black student to integrate schools in Alabama over 50 years ago. He was 6-years-old when he was finally allowed to enroll at Fifth Avenue School, an all white school.

"I want my students to understand that their struggle towards equality is also similar to the civil rights movement," SLC teacher Emily Canfield said. "I want them to understand what their rights are, how hard people had to fight to get them and how much harder we're gonna have to fight to keep them."

It all started on Sept. 3, 1963 when Hereford's late father Sonnie Hereford III walked his son to school and was denied access. A court ordered law, Brown vs. Board of Education,had been previously set in 1953 stating that it was not fair to keep black and white children from going to school together. But in Alabama nothing had changed.

"The doors were locked. I was confused as to why someone would want to keep me out of school, and not let anyone go," Hereford said.

Hereford's father looked to the law for assistance. He ordered a court case against the governor and school systems of Alabama at the time. Only six days later, Sept. 9, Sonnie IV gained access into the school. Many students then followed behind him on that same day. During the day federal agents came from Washington, D.C. to ensure black students were welcome into the schools without issues. Thirty one of the 35 families named in the suit dropped out in the six days it took for the integration order to take effect.

"[When integrating] There was extra pressure on me. I wasn't just representing myself or my family, I was representing my whole race. I was so young but I knew that," Sonnie said.

During the '40s, Hereford's father went to the only school that was offered to black children in Huntsville-a school surrounded by the city dump on three sides. They did not have a playground, a gym or a library. Blacks were also not allowed to use the public library or go to sporting events unless teams from the black high schools were playing.

"It was because people opened the doors to allow black people to do the same things white people could do," Hereford said. "A lot of young people don't realize that things weren't always like they are now."

In the early '60s, Hereford's father became an extreme civil rights activist. He spent most of his time with people like Martin Luther King Jr. and congressman John Lewis. Hereford now follows in his father's footsteps by helping social progress in schools. He attends board meetings, mentors students and offers tutoring. He even considers getting into politics later in his life.

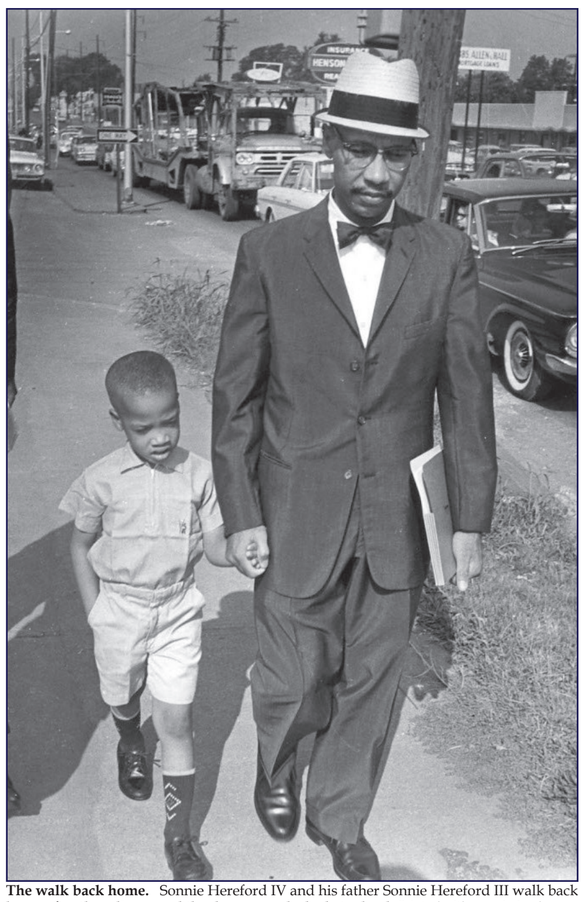
"My father has been my biggest motivator in my life," Hereford said. "Even though things were difficult he refused to be intimidated. I learned from that."

In elementary school, Hereford did not receive special treatment from the other students nor did he receive unfair treatment. Growing up, oddly enough, most of his mistreatment was from the other black students. It was said that Hereford was "too proper".

"I liked [going to a white school] because the children treated me very nicely," Hereford said. "That young the children hadn't been taught that they should be mean to me because of my skin. They were too young."

There is now a school named after Hereford in Huntsville, Sonnie Hereford Elementary. Sonnie also has two daughters that he encourages to take part in the social progress of society. There is also a monument recognizing Hereford as the first to integrate Alabama schools where Fifth Avenue School used to stand.

"We should never treat people differently just because they are a little different than we are," Hereford said. "It was because people opened the doors to allow black people to do the same things white people could do."



The walk back home. Sonnie Hereford IV and his father Sonnie Hereford III walk back home after they discovered the doors were locked at school. *Printed with premission by Sonnie Hereford*

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March 2, 1955, when the fifteen-year-old schoolgirl, Claudette Colvin, refused to move to the back of the bus, nine months before Rosa Parks' stand.

1688

Earliest recorded protest against slavery was by the Quakers in 1688.

12.5

12.5 million Africans shipped to the New World during the Transatlantic Slave Trade.

1963

Martin Luther King Jr. improvised the most iconic part of his "I Have a Dream Speech."

1 IN 4

One in four cowboys were black.

1664

Interracial marriage in the United Sates was banned in 1664 and not overturned until 1967.

http://www.pbs.org/black-culture/explore/10-black-history-little-known-facts/#.WJ4EEtIrIdU