

My Grandpa, Local Shaker Upper
by
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My Grandpa, Howard F Harris Jr, faced many challenges in his lifetime. He was born in 1934. He experienced segregation racism and many inequalities. His opportunities were limited due to racism. However, he accomplished many things that are not recognized today, but are important from a historic standpoint. Without him, St. Petersburg might be different today.

Howard F. Harris, Jr. went to segregated schools in Tampa from 1947 to 1953. He went to St. Petersburg Catholic School for junior high school. All his teachers were catholic nuns. There he learned how to write better than most and learned enough math to easily get through high school. He earned an award in religion, even though he was not Catholic. He attended Middleton High School. At the time Black teachers were paid half of what white teachers were paid. This was true even though some Black teachers were better educated and had advanced degrees from prestigious Ivy League schools. Black teachers seeking advanced degrees not available from FAMU were paid to study out of state because of segregation policies.

Grandpa's Middleton math teacher held after school classes for students he thought were gifted. His English teacher, Ms. Berry was hated by many because she was a hard task master. That was until her students got to college and realized that Ms. Berry had them doing college work. His first year in college was at Morehouse College in Atlanta, Georgia, one of the most prestigious colleges even today. At the end of the school year, a summer job took him to New York City. In New York, he attended the City College of New York. A semester before getting a degree in biochemistry, he was drafted and spent two years in the army. When he was on leave from the army, he came home to Tampa and met my Grandma at a party in St. Petersburg. When he got out of the service a few months later he moved to St. Pete to be close to my grandma. He got a job working at Morrison's Cafeteria. He was payed \$8.50 per week plus tips. He also attended Gibbs Junior College on Tuesdays and Thursdays to work towards a degree in education. At the time jobs for Blacks with a college education were limited to being a doctor, teacher, lawyer, and undertaker.

Grandpa showed up to work 10 minutes late one day because he stopped off to vote. His boss docked him two dollars for being late. He was upset and started looking for another job in the paper. He found one that said "Equal Opportunity". The ad was from Honeywell. He applied for a job as assistant mathematician. The person in the employment window said that job doesn't exist. He asked, "Then what jobs are available". The person in the window asked for him to move out of the way. He refused until and finally was given a dexterity test, which he flunked and an IQ test which he maxed. He was hired in 1962 and became the second Black hired by Honeywell in Pinellas County. He was employed as a driver picking up packages from places like the post office and airport and chauffeuring Honeywell executives. He was told that he had a job as long as he remained in school.

Remaining in school was a problem because Gibbs Junior College did not have a night school and the Honeywell job was in the daytime. He attempted to enroll in the all-white St Petersburg Junior College. He was initially refused entrance until college officials checked out his Honeywell story. He became one of 3 Blacks admitted into night school at the junior college.

In 1963, my Grandpa and my Grandma (a teacher) became involved with the NAACP Youth Group. They formed lines at movie theaters to attempt to buy tickets. When they were refused, they went to the back of the line and repeated the process. Blacks in other cities were spit on, beat up, and fired for participating in events like this. That's why most participants were children.

Harris was promoted to an Expediter. This job involved getting critical material from the receiving dock to the production line. He also trained college grads to become expeditors. The people he was training made over a hundred dollars more than him. For that reason, he took a leave of absence to attend USF. He was one of 10 Black students at USF and the only one in the College of Business. He graduated with a degree in accounting and was rehired by Honeywell as an electronics buyer and was the first Black with a college degree. He was later promoted to contracts administrator then became the chief negotiator and administrator for Honeywell's sub contract for the Space Shuttle.

In 1972, school integration was starting in St. Petersburg. A bus carried Black students to Dixie Hollins H.S. The bus was met by angry mobs standing on the streets outside the school, harassing the Black students. My Grandpa rode the bus several mornings and knew he had to take action. He went to the president of Honeywell and told him that this thing at Dixie Hollins made St. Petersburg look bad. The president called a meeting of the bigshots of St. Petersburg including the mayor, police chief, school superintendent. My Grandpa repeated the "Bad Image" story to them. The next day the police didn't let the mob stand on the city's right of way and ended the protest.

As integration for schools was on the rise, so was the closing of Black schools. Gibbs College was closed and the plan was to also close Gibbs High School. At the same time, there was a plan to build from scratch a vocational school in North Pinellas County. This would've happened if some people didn't take a stand against this. These people including my Grandpa went to the school board and convinced them to turn Gibbs into the vocational school it is today. Because of this effort, My Grandpa and others were given the keys to the City of St Petersburg by Mayor Herman Goldner.

My Grandpa is now 86 years old and lives in Tampa. Since retiring he has served on the Mayors African American Advisor Committee, The Hillsborough County Library Board, and Treasurer of the Friends of the Library of Hillsborough County. He presently tutors kids from his old Tampa neighborhood and is secretary for the Friends of the C. Blythe Andrews Library. He has had some pretty amazing accomplishments for a man of his time. I mean, we would not have Gibbs Vocational School if it wasn't for him and his involvement in the community. It is

amazing how he carries himself today in his mid 80s. My Grandpa is active in Tampa and finds time to spend with my brother and I in St. Petersburg teaching us how to invest in the stock market.