

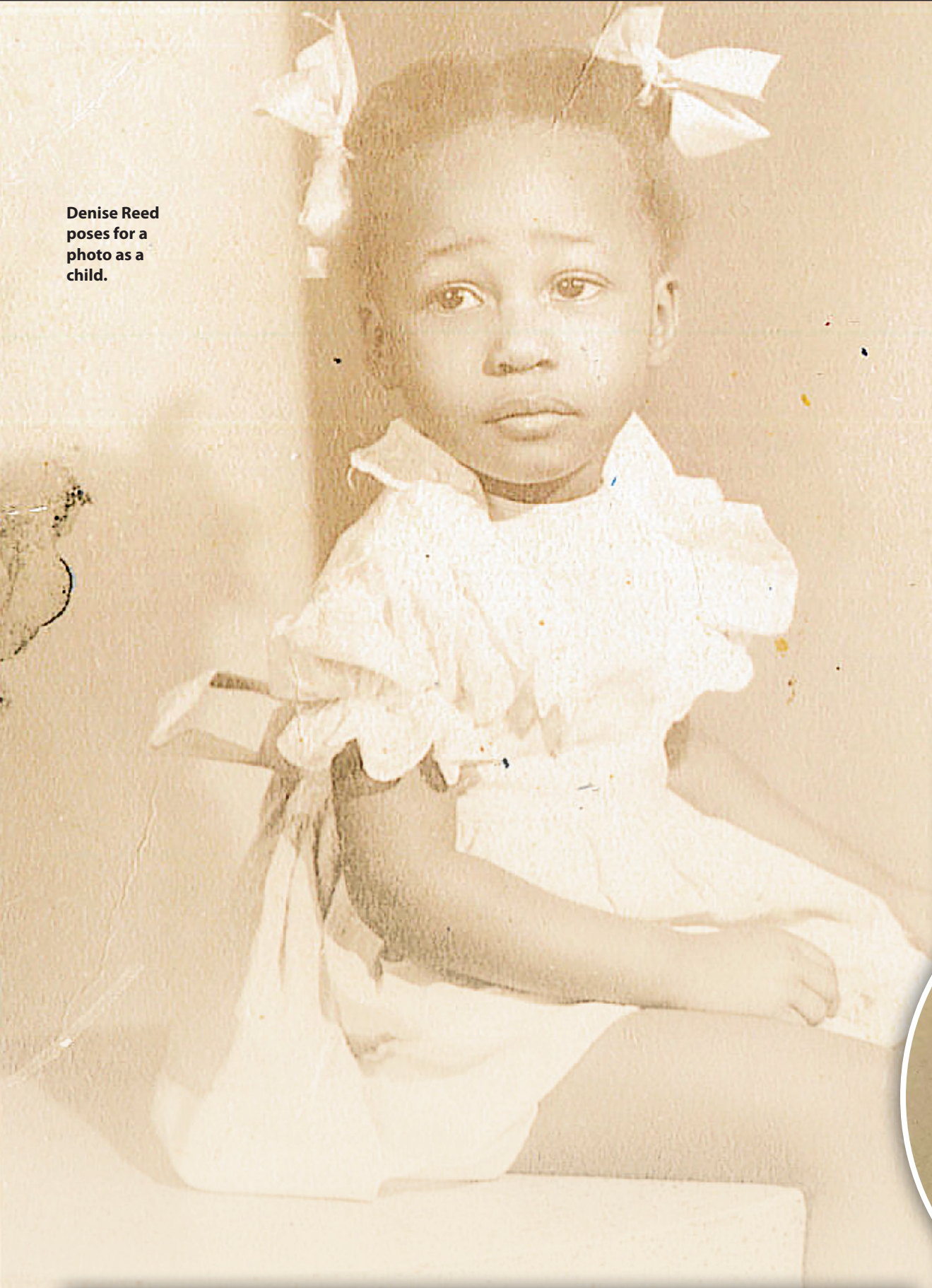
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WEEKEND BREAK



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Denise Reed poses for a photo as a child.



MOVING FORWARD, LOOKING BACK

Writer examines modern African American life



By DENISE REED

For Black History Month, I decided to write from the perspective of someone who has lived the African American experience in the 21st century. Since I think my experiences are similar to those of many African Americans in our society, I chose to relate some of my experiences.

Prejudice in pop culture

I recently viewed the classic movie, “Gentleman’s Agreement,” starring Gregory Peck as a reporter writing about anti-Semitism. In the film, Peck’s character pretends to be Jewish to experience anti-Semitism.

The movie takes place soon after World War II, but as I watched, I saw relevance in the movie’s events. Many attitudes and behaviors portrayed can be related to prejudice and discrimination in present society.

“Gentleman’s Agreement” shows the excluding of Jews from restaurants, clubs, schools and housing. This discriminatory behavior is enabled by those who bear witness silently, thus creating a silent agreement.

Those who keep silent when someone makes stereotypical comments encourage discriminatory attitudes. These consensual understandings allow prejudice, producing, at the minimum, awkward moments for the recipient of prejudicial remarks and actions.

Acknowledging and responding to such awkward moments is crucial to participation in conversations about race. Such conversations are essential for allowing us to move toward a society in which diversity is appreciated. It is essential to our ability to live together.

Personal experiences

When awkward moments occur and no one speaks up, our society experiences misunderstanding and resentment between races.

In the late 70s, my vehicle broke down while on a Florida road trip. I had to be towed to a gas station in a small town between Miami and Fort Lauderdale. My young son was with me and patiently waited while my car was repaired. After several hours in the summer heat, he told me softly but insistently that he needed to use the restroom.

Across the street was a restaurant. As soon as I opened the door, I saw an all-white

A sketch of Denise Reed conducting.



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