

OBSERVATIONS

FROM THE SIDELINES
By Kathryn Bogle

To celebrate the tenth anniversary of the Black Education Center, its founders are planning an "Anniversary Banquet" set for Friday evening, October 3, 1980 at Westminster Presbyterian Church at 1624 N. E. Hancock Street.

It was in May, 1970 Ron Herndon, Joyce Harris and Frank Wilson pooled their talents, their ideas and dreams and opened a school for Black children that would give them pride in their racial heritage, that would supply the basic tools of reading, writing, arithmetic, and strengthen them with a daily build-in of courage and determination to gain an education for their life-time use in an impersonal, sometimes hostile, world.

The beginning of BEC was as a summer school, operating on this limited basis until 1974 when the school went to the traditional school year as it does at the present.

Classes are small, allowing teachers more time with individual students. BEC prefers the young child, taking them at kindergarten age and working with them intensively through the fourth grade. According to Mrs. Harris, the BEC

program has met with acceptance and support from Black parents in the community who have found the program sound and rewarding for their children.

"A bookstore, the 'Talking Drum' is also in operation to channel profits into supporting funds for BEC," said Mrs. Harris. "We are there to sell books - Black literature of all kinds, fiction, non fiction, prose, poetry, history and philosophy. We also sell greeting cards, some musical instruments, a few carvings and African garments of fashion, but books are our principal interest."

The banquet committee, headed by Mrs. Harris, plans to issue a "tenth anniversary souvenir book," said to be "basically pictorial," presenting a history of the BEC. There will be a program during the banquet hours which will feature the "Talking Drum Dancers." The banquet itself will be served buffet style and the public is invited to attend.

Banquet committee members are: Carolyn Brown, Maisha Fuller, Julia Fletcher and Guyann Herndon. For ticket information call 284-9552.



Ebonee Bell, daughter of Iris and Leonard Bell, is a Black Educational Center student. (Photo: Richard J. Brown)

Cell Talk

By Asmar Abdul Seifullah
aka Joe West #40404

Prisoner #38665 is a Blackman. He is 5'11 - 147 lbs and has large moon like eyes that have a musky sensuous quality about them. They seem to radiate secret songs from a long forgotten time. His eyes cast spells and move beyond themselves as if being more than eyes. He wears his hair in the natural style. It is long and coarse and would put most sisters to shame. His voice is soft and he speaks as though he is not absolutely sure about what he wants to say. At times one has to strain to hear him but this is only because he is a low key person by nature. There are times when you wouldn't know that he is around because he does many things to conceal himself from curious strangers. That isn't because he is unsure of himself, but in his own words, "man, people be trippin too much for me, I ain't got time for all that madness."

Vincent Lamont Jones is prisoner #38665. He is 24 years old and has been confined in Oregon State Penitentiary for the past 52 months. Vincent is serving a 20 year sentence for multiple crimes and is looking forward to being released on parole soon. Prison hasn't been an easy experience for Vincent but none of his young life has been a bed of roses.

He is the second oldest child in a

family of seven and says that his mother raised the family without a man's help. Vincent feels that his mother did a good job bringing up her children and that his present incarceration isn't a reflection of his home life. In his soft tone voice he states that he was only trying to survive and fulfill his needs when he committed his offenses. He is not bitter about life or the knocks and bumps it has dealt him and he has a good outlook on the future. He realizes that if he is going to stay out of prison that things will have to break right for him once he is released.

"I'm independent...prison teaches you to be that way. I know that ain't nobody gonna give me nothing and that I have to do it on my own. I'll make it because I don't want to spend the rest of my life in places like this!" he said.

When asked what has prison done for him, he said it showed him that only he could make his dreams come true. "Everything I've accomplished was on my own. I could have laid here and suffocated waiting on these people to help me. They've got the facilities but they don't know how to guide you toward the things you need...only you can do that...you have to do it on your own."

The hardest thing he has had to deal with is getting use to being without his wife and child. "Man, a man needs to be able to watch his children grow up and he needs the love and support of his woman to be successful. It took me two and a half years to adjust and during that time, I lost most of the things that I really cared about. When I get out I've got to start all over again. Most of all I've got to learn how to care about people again and that's not going to be easy when you've had people messing over you for X number of years."

Vincent will have a certificate in welding shortly and John Belguard his instructor, says that he is the best natural welder he has ever seen. Vincent comments that his instructor didn't crowd him or press him to produce quickly. "He let me feel my way through the exercises and the rest came naturally." John Belguard is, by the way, the first Black man to work as a vocational instructor at Oregon State Penitentiary.

Vincent is also the 400 meter champion at Oregon State Penitentiary and he says that before he graduated from Grant High School he ran track, plus with seven brothers and sisters it was always a race to the dinner table. Vincent has maintained his sense of humor and hasn't lost his taste for competition. These two ingredients will help Vincent survive once he is released. At some point in time Vincent will have to smile and keep on stepping when things get rough.

Vincent Lamont Jones is a very exceptional person. He is exceptional because the years spent in prison haven't destroyed him beyond repair. He is exceptional because his beginnings aren't necessarily his end and this young Black man has accomplished something for himself when all the odds were against him.

He has refused to lie down in the grave prepared for him by the criminal justice system. His dreams and visions of self worth have sustained him during a very difficult period of time. And out of the rubble and ruin of clanging prison doors and ringing bells he has risen to recalibrate his manhood and identity. The prison days and nights are something that Vincent will never forget. They are part of him as are his moon like eyes and long coarse natural hair. Wherever he goes, whatever he does he will remember Oregon State Penitentiary. The ringing bells and clanging doors will echo deep inside of him for a long time to come but they won't stop him from being the man he has

promised himself to be. In Vincent's words, "I don't want to forget what I've been through behind these walls because it's the memory and the pain that accompanies these memories that's going to keep me out of places like this."

If you happen to see a slender dark skinned brother with penetrating moon like eyes and a afro that swings and sways with every step, it very well might be Vincent Lamont Jones. If he smiles and keeps on stepping it will be Vincent Lamont Jones and not prisoner #38665!

As always we ask that Allah bless these lines and those people who've made it possible for the brothers inside to communicate with the brothers and sisters outside. The prerequisite for peace and love is struggle and commitment. Support your dreams with action!!!

Workshop for returning women students. Registration, September 26, 8 am to 7 pm Portland State University gym, September 29-30, October 1-3: days, 9 am to 5 pm Harder House, SW 1st and Market; evenings: 5 to 7 pm. First class meets September 30, 1980.

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FROM THE FRONT DOOR

BY TOM BOOTHE

From the front door, I was requested by several citizens here in the community to reprint an article that I ran earlier on our schools and the learning process, specifically, as it relates to the children and parents here in our community.

Before I rerun my statement, I would like you to read an article published in the Portland Chapter Urban League newsletter. This article also describes the Key to success in the educational process. When this key is applied it opens the door to success for our children, and conversely, when this key is not applied, the door to success for our children remains locked.

The following is a word for word reprint of that article, printed by permission from Freddie Petett, Executive Director of Portland Urban League:

PARENT INVOLVEMENT KEY TO SUCCESS

The goals and objectives of the Urban League School Community Program for the past six years have been to increase parent involvement in the education of their children. The emphasis has been on the parents of the administrative transfer youngsters, though certainly not limited to them. Parent involvement in education has taken some interesting turns in the last decade. The only common fact is that parental involvement in schools is decreasing.

Gone are the days of PTA meetings and room mother or father being the total realm of activities for parents. Those tasks are still around but they are just a small part of the whole. Now in Portland and nationally there are advisory committees for every area of education and also connected to a wide variety of staff and school board assignments. In order for one to fully participate in these forums it is important to do some homework. Many of the programs in the school district had their beginnings in an advisory committee. The federal government has been a prime mover in the development of parent involvement by mandating the existence of advisory and even policy making committees for the programs they fund.

Basic to the idea of parent involvement is the support for the student. Data shows that one of the keys to successful achievement by students is an active, informed parent. A parent who understands what the educational process is all about and works with the child to help him work through the system. A parent who is informed about the schools and working in some capacity at the school signals the importance of education to the student. This is not only true of education but also of extra curricular activities. Scouts, sports, arts, crafts and music all require participation of the parent to make these experiences rewarding and enriching for the child. Unfortunately many parents feel their involvement in the schools ends after the elementary grades.

This is an erroneous assumption. When you consider how critical the goal setting and life planning skills of the secondary student are, parental guidance becomes more important. There are no substitutes for the combination of home and school in working to meet the unique and individual needs of students. Counselors cannot do this enormous task alone effectively.

There is a place for each and every parent who has the time, energy and interest to become actively involved in the successful education of his or her child. We need only to take time to survey the field and find that detailed planning helps make education come alive for children.

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