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"The Eyes and Ears of the Community"

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Saturday School Opens: It's Magic

by Nyewusi Askari

This is not an article. It's a story — a story I'm going to tell in the style, custom and tradition of African-American storytellers — ancient, present and future. There is a musical voice here, filled with the voices of children. It is for them that this story is written.

Saturday, February 20. On this partly cloudy morning in North/Northeast Portland, there is a lot of excitement in the atmosphere — the music of children's voices dance through the cool morning air as they file out of cars and trucks in front of churches where teachers wait to meet and greet them.

There is something different about this particular Saturday morning. There are more mothers, fathers, relatives, and kinfolk out and about. They, too, are headed to church. Once there, they meet, they greet, and they embrace each other. They smile, they laugh and they talk about what a great day in the morning it is.

When they enter the churches, it is like they have entered an African-American history museum. African-American history over here, African-American history over there, African-American history everywhere. The atmosphere is warm, friendly, and electric — the kind of atmosphere you find when old friends meet to create something gracious and powerful.

And like a light being turned on gently and slowly, the churches transform into classrooms and teachers, displaying confidence, eagerness and delight, effortlessly become the bearers and sharers of cultural wisdom, knowledge and understanding.

The children are welcomed. Hanging on the wall of each classroom is a banner that says, "Welcome to the Black United Front Saturday School." The teachers ask the students if they know the name of the program they are attending. "The Saturday School," they shout. The teachers point to the banner and



Children at the BUF Saturday School find themselves in a loving and caring environment.

Photo by Richard J. Brown

While passing out name tags and crayons, the teachers ask the students to state their name, age, and the school they attend. The students are then instructed to write their names and decorate their name tags. "Many people volunteered to help the Black United Front make this program happen," the teachers say.

The introduction of the Saturday School Pledge of Excellence ignites group participation, recitation, and questions to the students. "What does excellence mean? What does it mean to be proud? How can you show that you feel proud? What do we promise to do in our pledge?" The students shoot back the right answers like college graduates competing for their degrees in law.

By now there isn't a dry, wordless mouth in the house. The classrooms are a buzzin'. A "Draw Yourself Proud" sheet is distributed, and students are instructed to draw and color a pic-

ture of themselves. Then comes the introduction to the Black National Anthem. Students are informed that they will sing the Anthem each Saturday after they say the Pledge of Excellence.

Using the Oral Tradition technique of group recitation, and call and response, the students learn quickly and can't seem to wait for the next set of instructions. What they get is an introduction to the rules of the Saturday School. "Be respectful of yourself, your classmates, and your teacher. Be courteous. We can all sing together, but not talk. No put-downs of any kind. If it's not positive, don't say it. No running at any time. Ask permission before leaving the group. Clean up behind yourself. If you can't abide by these rules, you will be asked to leave." They tell the children that these are the rules that they will be expected to follow while attending the Saturday School. "No sweat," the students say.

Then the teachers and the students get way down inside the rules. "What is a rule? Why do we have rules? What rules do you have at home and school? What happens when we don't follow the rules? What should we do when someone forgets to follow a rule? How can we help

each other follow the rules?"

It is evident that this day belongs to the children. On this day they are not bridled by the color of their skin. Their teachers, Black and white, speak the same language, impart the same knowledge, and show the same warmth, love and concern. On this day, Black and white are doing it together and color ain't got nothing to do with it. On this day, the children experience how it feels to be constantly told, "You can learn; you are smart; excellence is your purpose; be proud of yourselves, your families, and your community."

From somewhere deep inside, the children know that the day belongs to them, and they show their appreciation and understanding of what is taking place.

They follow the rules. They participate when called on. They help each other answer difficult questions. They say "excuse me" when feeling out of line about something they did accidentally or purposefully. They address the teachers by "Mr." or "Ms.". They pay attention. And, they learn.

On this day, they are the brightest stars in Oregon's universe.

On this day, they are pampered; they are given undivided attention; they are treated special; they are congratulated by strangers, applauded by family members, and praised by all.

The energy is high; the potential is unlimited.

The opening of the Black United Front Saturday School, Feb. 20, was an historic event; an event all of Oregon should applaud and support. And those who were there on this day will never forget it. Indeed, we all should "Lift every voice and sing, till earth and heaven ring, ring with the harmonies of liberty." And, we should "Let our rejoicing rise high as the listening skies," and "Let it resound loud as the rolling sea."

To Move or Be Made To Move!

by Mattie Ann Callier-Spears

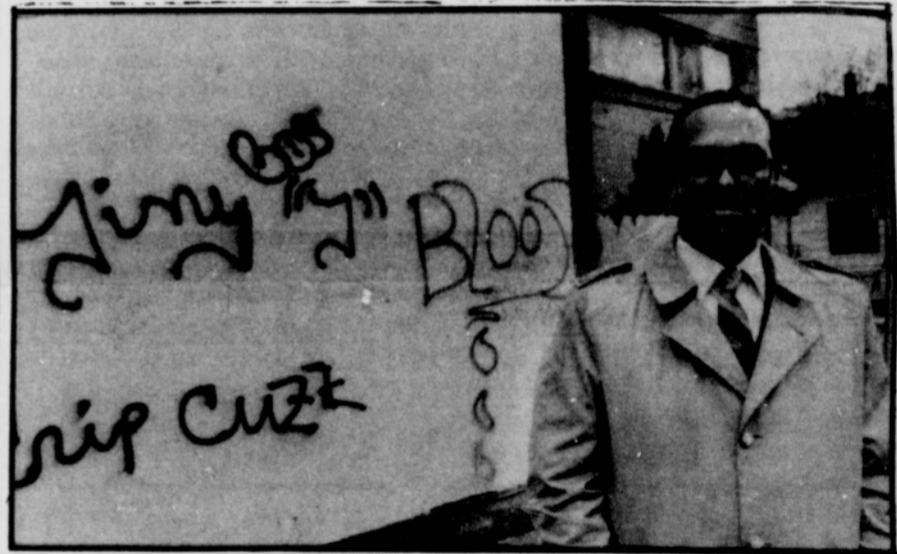
Everyday here in Portland, when we listen to or read the news, there is something about the gangs that have come to the Northwest. All this talk and print about these gangs and their activities is not solving a thing.

There are some Portland residents who have resolved to move, because they feel that the problem has gotten out of hand. They feel that the police are not equipped to handle them; the

and then it went outside, because one of the boys was buzzing around a girl who had come with her boyfriend.

The boyfriend didn't like it. Right? The boyfriend called the outsider. Right? Wrong! The outsider did not come alone. He had not one or two, but eight comrades with him. Description: gang.

Not only did he have his little friends with him, but he had the biggest gun you ever saw in your



"Youth gangs in Portland, and especially Northeast area, have increased their presence and violence. There is a growing number of incidents being reported by citizens concerning youth gangs and the fear that is gripping the city about violence at schools, on Tri-Met and in the community. There is a need for all citizens to become active in efforts to solve the problems. Our young people need to know that we care and that the community is willing to do whatever is necessary to safeguard them. Not all, but only a small number of, young people are involved in gangs, and we must support the vast majority of youth who are doing positive things." — Dennis Payne, Youth Gang Task Force

Photo by Richard J. Brown

police are not trained to handle them; and the police are just "spinning" their wheels.

"Why don't we just move and let them have it," stated one neighbor. Well, this will not do.

Why should we as home owners, who have raised our children and have lived in the same house for 10, 15 or even 25 years, just up and leave our homes and allow these misguided children to run over our lives?

Move? NO! Stay and fight for what is rightfully ours — not theirs.

The Portland Police Department is now getting it together. There are liaison persons willing to hear you out on any grievance you have which has resulted from any gang-related disturbance. There are also support personnel in the schools. There are parent groups — with not enough parents in them — meeting on a monthly basis — all trying to find the common denominator.

This past weekend, a group of young boys entered a party — uninvited. Crashed it, if you will. Crashing a party — that's really no big deal . . . 15 years ago, maybe, or even 5 years ago. Here in Portland, all you had to do was to have your parents come to the door or basement and remove the unwanted guests from the premises.

Well, this party started inside

life. It didn't stop there. He not only pulled the gun, which happened to be a 357 magnum, but he fired it.

Question: Is this Portland? Is this my neighborhood?

"In appearances — only — is it still the place where I, my children and my friends live," states one of the neighbors. "Ever since those little hoodlums moved around the corner, the neighborhood has changed," quotes still another person on the block.

This kind of occurrence has got to stop. We, who have been here in the city a long time, should not let a handful of people come into our town and literally take over: take over the minds of our children; take over the moral values; take over our schools' operation; take away our peace of mind and security.

The schools are occupied by our children. I said "Our children!" We, as parents, should know what our children are doing, who their friends are, what they are doing with their spare time, and why they are not behaving in a usual manner.

How many parents are able to say, "I really know my son or daughter?"

Just two weeks ago, there was a lot of young people in the middle of the intersection at the end of our block. There was a

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13 GIRLS ARRESTED AT ROSEMONT

by Ian MacCrae

The Rosemont Residential Treatment Center and School at 597 N. Dekum was the site of a disturbance on Monday, Feb. 22 which resulted in the arrest of 13 children. The children, ranging from 14 to 16 years of age, had barricaded themselves inside an upstairs dormitory. Rosemont Executive Director Allen L. Hunt explained that the trouble began on Thursday with the arrival of a new girl who behaved aggressively toward staff members, refusing to cooperate with staff members and threatening several of them. By Friday, said Hunt, the newcomer's violent behavior had had a destabilizing influence on several of the other girls in the unit for emotionally disturbed or "borderline personalities." Two counselors were bitten, and others received minor injuries. One counselor, initially thought to have a broken collarbone after



Aftermath of the unrest at Rosemont.

Photo by Richard J. Brown

being kicked by the children, was later diagnosed as having a sprained shoulder.

The children's misbehavior

continued through Saturday when three juveniles were arrested, taken to the Donald E. Long Juvenile Detention Center

and charged with fourth degree assault, according to Police Bureau Information Officer Henry Groeper. The children were returned to the school later Saturday in accordance with a state law which prohibits detention of most juvenile offenders for prolonged periods. Problems continued through Sunday night, but by Monday morning the children seemed to have calmed down.

After having breakfast Monday morning, however, twelve of the children suddenly "shot back" into their dormitory on the second floor of the school, said Hunt, using beds to barricade the door. At this point, he said, both clinicians and staff were exhausted from having worked overtime every night over the weekend. Feeling they could no longer handle the children, Hunt called in the police who quickly talked

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