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Sharing Memmories from 1969 @ SIUE to 2006

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Recruitment and Retention- Reasons for Coming to SIUE

W. Deane Wiley, Dean of Education, SIUE, former principal of Claremont High School, Claremont, California, recommended for a teaching position at Claremont High School in 1964. A time of civil unrest, Claremont, the city, and the High School, was for the most part an American white community. I was the first African American teacher in the Claremont Community School District. When the superintendent found out that Mr. Wiley had hired me without his approval, some sensitive discussions took place. All I knew that I would be a English teacher At Claremont High School. The summer before I was to begin teaching, I was invited to a wedding in San Salvador, El Salvador. When the wedding party knew I had boarded the plane to San Salvador, the bride and groom told their parent that I was an African American. The father, the American ambassador to San Salvador, and his wife told the wedding party that I would not be allowed to participate in the wedding. My friends told their parents that without me, the wedding would be cancelled. Upon arriving, I felt the stares, saw the strains of the parents faces. I knew there was disharmony in this home. The parents told my friends that I would have to sit with the servants. My friends said no and since I was the groom's assistant, I would be escorting the guests to their seats, and upon completion, I had a designated seat in the family pews. Much discussion took place. The results were ameliorated. I did participate in the wedding; I did dance with the mother of the bride; Since I had taken a dance class while in college, I danced the waltz, the samba, the cha cha cha, the jitterbug, and soul dance with many of the guests from France, England, United States, and San Salvador. I think that I was seen as the only black at the wedding, I saw myself as the happy groomsman.

Leaving El Salvador with an emotional high that vanquished when I found out that I would not be able to rent an apartment in California. Some told me that I would make the property values of their homes go down. Others refused to answer the door even though I saw them peering from behind closed curtains. There were discussions about me. While I was received warmly from some parents, teachers, and students, I experienced negative incidents that should not have occurred. For example, I was referred to tutor a student who was failing, The counselor who referred me did not tell them that I was an African American. She told them that I was the best English teacher in the district. Those parents, reluctantly, accepted me. Their son and I became great friends. Thos parents became the most gracious, positive people I have ever met. We became friends for over thirty years. I believe when people are able to share their stories of discrimination, hate, fear, etc, with someone unlike them, good things happen. The releasing of old stereotypes is very healing. One sees a person not by the color of his/her

skin but as Martin Luther King Jr. said, "judge me not by the color of my skin but by the content of my character"

At Claremont High School I was selected after one year to be the department chairperson of the English department and the Master Teacher of English in California. I was encouraged to enroll in a PhD program at Claremont Graduate School. I was told that I was being considered for an administrative position in the district.

As I assumed my new position as chairperson, the Viet Nam War was being debated. Colleagues who I trusted began to use the classroom as a place to proseltize the position. I was told by the Claremont Board of Education to issue a warning to these teachers, my friends, to stop what they were doing or be fired. I knew that I could not participate in this "witch hunt".

President John Rend leman, SIUE, and faculty from the School of Education came to Claremont and observed me. Later on, I was told that I was what they needed at SIUE. They told me that I would be the first person of color in the school, that I was the only person who has a teaching degree in English Education, and that I was exactly what SIUE and surrounding communities needed- A teacher who faced adversity and survived and a teacher who cared. I accepted the contract and began teaching on my birthday, June 17, 1969.

I came to Edwardsville believing that the past experiences- prejudice, in toleration, insensitivity and hate would not be seen in Edwardsville. Little did I know that history will repeat itself if given an opportunity. I went to Blackjack, Missouri to rent an apartment. There was nothing for me. I filed a complaint with the Fair Housing Administration. I became a complaint filed not a complaint acted upon. Since I could not afford to purchase a house in Edwardsville, I sought out the few available apartment buildings in Edwardsville. Again, I heard the complaint. Nothing is available. Property values will drop. Have you been where the black community lives- East St. Louis, St. Louis, and Alton?

I did find an apartment in Edwardsville. The Huntleigh Apartment was my first dwelling in Illinois. As a courtesy to the community, an organization, WELCOME WAGON, sent volunteers who would act a ambassadors for the community. I remember the day the Welcome Wagon lady came to my apartment and saw that I was black. Gifts that I should have received were put back in her Welcome Wagon bag. I was told that there were no barbers or beauty shops in Edwardsville for Black people. I was told that if I had any children, no white child would be allowed to babysit my children. I was told that there were race riots in the Edwardsville High School. A white male high school student had taken a black girl to the Senior Prom. I thought I was experiencing déjà vu? Should I live here?

During my first summer in Edwardsville, I met Winston Brown, the first African American teacher in Edwardsville after the schools were integrated and Dr. Emil Jason, an administrator at SIUE. I was asked to participate in town meeting and to help to bring harmony and understanding to the irate adults and students. My windows were broken. I received threatening calls. With support from the Edwardsville police department, and the Edwardsville School district, the mayor appointed a Human Relations Committee * whose charge was to investigate matters of discrimination and prejudice. During the

same time period, Sears Roebuck was charged with employment discrimination. I was one of the individuals asked to meet with group of irate black citizens and to develop a positive plan to remove racial bias in hiring. I remember talking to an administrator from Sears telling me that I would be able to get a job in the company because of the color of my skin. I was not too black!. Soon, the hiring of a diverse work force was in place.

To many of the citizens in the surrounding communities, I was seen as a positive interventionist. Some citizens encouraged me to run for public offices when they became available. I was asked to run for senator, representative, mayor, councilman, and school board member.

At SIUE, administrators, faculty, staff, and students supported my efforts to make this university diversity friendly. I remember attending a party where we were asked to bring a baby picture of ourselves. Now I thought that was a great idea except that my baby picture would be identified by everyone. I asked a white friend to lend me his baby picture, It was fun watching the party goers agonize on which picture was of me. Later, I commented on why I did what I did. My colleagues told me that the manner in which I handled a very sensitive matter was appreciated.

Even though I never lived in an urban community, I was asked to teach a class on urban education. Dr. Joseph Gore and I had written an article on urban education and our experiences working with teachers from East St. Louis. My students visited some of the schools in East St. Louis. "Jessie Brown, a cook Jessie's café in Edwardsville, cooked a "soulful dinner". They visited my home, attended a "black church" and during class, listened to African Americans share their stories of growing up in a segregated society. Even today, thirty of so years later, these students tell me that I helped them to appreciate and understand the efforts to reduce racism and prejudice in our society.

McLennan
President Randleman and Dr. Morris wanted SIUE to be an institution that promoted diversity among its faculty, staff, and students. Dr. Lucille McLennan, the first African American Dean at SIUE, Dr. Emil Jason, Associate Provost for Planning and Minority Recruitment, Mr. Arthur Grist, Assistant to the Chancellor, Mr. John Flamer, Track coach, advisor to the President Randleman and Dr. Delete Morris, De. Boone Hammond, the first African American faculty in the department of Sociology, Dr. Katherine Dunham- all these individuals were employed by SIUE before 1969 and the program, Experiment in Higher Education designed to give youth from the East. St. Louis area an opportunity to complete their first two years of college studies in their hometown and then being able to transfer their credits to SIUE. The first director of this program was _____, after him, there were Mitchell Boyd, Art Grist, Emil Jason, (I was asked to the assistant director of this program. I declined the offer.), Johnetta Haley, (under President Earl Lazerson and Provost Barbara Teeter, EHE was demolished and under Ms. Haley's Direction, the name East St. Louis Center was created. The Headstart Program at the East St. Louis Center was funded. Upward Bound, other TRIO programs and the Katherine Dunham Center for the Performance Arts became and still are the mainstays of the center.

Under Deane Wiley's tenure as Dean of the School of Education, the commitment to diversify the faculty became a mandate, In four years, 1969 -73, Barbara Havis, James Owens, James Walker, Ruges Freeman, Anita Foxworth, Calvin Burnett, Wilbur Campbell, Wilbur McAfee, Willie Pyke, Alphonso Trotman, Jack Whitted, Ina Sledge, Beverly Douglass, Doris Bell, Sylvia Mitchell, Roslyn Sykes, Ed Hudlin, Sandra Wilson and I were hired. The Search Committee concept that is in place now was not used. Administrators played a key role in recruitment of minorities.

In that same time period, Dr. Jason recruited Roy Peterson, a biologist, George Hansberry, Teresa Love, Artists Phil Hampton, Joseph Smith, and Floyd Coleman, Ramon Williamson, Music, Johnetta Haley, historian, and faculty for the EHE program- totaling 26 African Faculty at SIUE.(see African American and African Faculty)

★ President Rend leman found out that I was not allowed to supervise student teachers in one school He sent a memo disconnecting SIUE student teaching candidates from participating in that school district. .