

*I Like Friends...*

*I Like People*



*by Melinda L. Banks*





**LARKSFIELD  
PRESS**

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## My Family

I don't know a lot about my grandparents. Both of my grandmothers were dead before I was born. When my mother was eighteen, her mother died. My dad's mother died when he was four years old. Both of my grandmothers were originally from Texas.



*My parents: Gordon Ruben Newsom & Ruby Melinda Foreman*

My mother's dad died when I was seventeen years old. He came to Oklahoma as a young man from Raleigh, North Carolina. He was fortunate enough to run and stake ground in Logan County. They still call this '89ers day in Guthrie, Oklahoma. It was in 1889 when they ran.

My mother's family grew to be eleven children who are all deceased now. My dad's dad remarried and had eight children by his second wife. He already had five children by his first wife.

My parents, Gordon Ruben Newsom and Ruby Melinda Foreman, had attended grade school together. Later they were married on December 30, 1915 in Logan County, Oklahoma. The two of them wanted to have three or four children, and they were married for four years and three months before I was born. I came along on Friday, March 6, 1920 at 6:30 p.m. I was a six-pound girl, and they worshipped me, because I was the only child. My parents and I lived in a small one-bedroom house in the country several miles from the largest town in Logan County, which was Guthrie.



*Melinda Banks, circa 1920*

One day my mother left me with my daddy to go visiting for an hour or so, but Daddy fell asleep. At the time, I could crawl, and got into a jar of petroleum jelly. I greased the floor as far as I could reach, then put some on my head and stomach. My mother was so upset with my dad when she got home.

By the time I had begun to walk, we moved into my grandfather's and step-grandmother's home. It was in the country also, but near Oklahoma City. My mother's dad bought that house while Mother was still at home. It was quite large for us with three bedrooms and an unfinished



*My  
grandparent's  
house, where I  
grew up*

bath on the second floor. On the first floor was the entry hall, a twelve by twelve room with stairs leading up from it. These stairs and the kitchen stairs came together at the landing, then went up to the bedrooms. The kitchen, dining room and living room were large. The house had a screened-in back porch and a cement front porch that ran all the way across the house.

We owned cows, horses, hogs and chickens. This farm was 140 acres, which had to be worked. My dad was a hard worker weighing less than one hundred and twelve pounds. I

knew how to feed the hogs and pigs, but did very little outside. My dad took care of everything. My mother did the housekeeping, and would help outside chopping cotton in the spring and picking cotton in the late fall.

I did very little work on the farm. I was taught to wash dishes at five years old. I had to stand on a little box to do the dishes. We used two dishpans: one to wash, the other to rinse dishes with.

Our wood stove was a large cook stove with two ovens. There was a large one under the burners, and we had a warming oven on top. I could not chop wood, but I could bring it in to use for heating and cooking. I also learned to help in our spring garden.

My mother taught me to cook at an early age. I could make better biscuits and cornbread than I can now. By the time I was ten or eleven, I made my first cake. I slipped in and made it. It turned out real light. Then, my mother wanted me to make others but they never turned out quite as good as the first one.

We had our own butter, eggs and milk. The only thing we had to buy was sugar, flour, baking powder and flavor.

I remember we got a "T" model car when I was three or four years old. My mother learned to drive it forward, but couldn't back up. I would have to stand or sit in the back seat when she drove.

We had horses and a buggy when I was born. My personal horse that I learned to ride was named "Nelly." She was a pretty white with dark tail and mane, and had two different little colts.

While I was yet a child, my mother would help with cousins. I



*Melinda Banks at three or four years*

had an aunt who had only one son that was seven or eight years older than me. His mother would send him to the farm each summer to live with us. He had three months to work and keep from getting involved with the city boys. They lived in Wichita, Kansas and Tulsa, Oklahoma. When he was 12 or 14, he quit coming to the farm. His mother found little jobs in the city for him.

My mother had another sister who had one son born the same year I was. He was six months younger than me. He would stay with us in the summer, too. His mother lived in Oklahoma City. He was about three or four-years-old when he started staying with us. He stopped that when he got to be a teenager.

My mother had a brother who lost his wife. They had three children, aged six, eight, and nine years old. The two boys were the oldest. The six-year-old girl came to live with us. I was eight years old and we got along real good. My mother would dress us like twins, but our dresses would be trimmed different. My uncle remarried when she was eight, so she went home to live with her dad, stepmother and two brothers.

I had another uncle, my mother's youngest brother, who lost his wife. His little three-year-old son came to live with us and stayed until he was called to service when he was 18-years-old. He was six years younger than me, so I really didn't grow up alone.

One aunt lived near us for a while. She had seven girls and no boys. There are four of them still living in St. Louis, Missouri and Chicago, Illinois.

I had lots of cousins. My mother and father were both from large families. My nickname was "Sugar," and my cousins all still call me "Sugar."

## School

I started school at the age of five in 1925. I was real wormy when I was two up to four years old. We were poor in one sense with no money to spend like people now have. But we always had plenty of food and we always worshipped God and put Him first in our lives.

Even in grade school, we had a devotion each morning and a flag salute before beginning our school work for the day.

When President Hoover was in office in 1932 or 1933, money really was scarce. In our grade schools, teachers would get government commodities, which was food. They would make big pots of soup, or sometimes pots of beans, cooked on the large wood stove heaters. We also had big boxes of crackers. We would bring homemade cookies and teacakes from home for our desserts.

When I starting to school at five-years-old in the country or rural schools, it wasn't called kindergarten. At the beginning it was called "primer" through the eighth grade. High school was ninth grade through twelfth grade. The classroom was made up of children from primer through the eighth grade. We had no divisions and only one teacher. Sometimes the eighth grade children would help the teacher and the teacher could rest for a while. Our grade schools were usually one room, but some had two rooms.

I knew to read, count, spell, and all those things, but it was boring when I started to school. Some of the children my age did not know their ABC's or how to count to 100.

We had a lot of recesses. I always enjoyed playing with children being an only child. I never got tired of playing.

We would walk at least one to three miles to school. Very few children were overweight. On rainy or snowy school days, our parents would take us to school and pick us up after school at four p.m. if they had transportation.

Later, I changed to another school, which was a two-room school. It went from primer to the fourth grade, then the fourth grade through the eighth grade. When you finished the eighth grade, you would take a test and go to high school, which was clear in town. I had to go to town in Guthrie to Faver High School. I only had to walk two or three blocks through town to school from where I roomed. The high school principal was my parents' grade school teacher and a friend of my grandparents.

After going to high school, I met a lot of kids. I just loved going to the ball games and so forth. I also roomed with people; I roomed with three or four different families. The first year I roomed with a principal and his wife. The next year they said that they didn't think they'd take anybody young, because they were pretty old people. The next year I went to school, I roomed with a friend of my granddaddy's.



*Melinda Banks in teenage years*

She was up in age, but she was nice and lived alone. She was a caterer and always had me help her cook when I had time. The last family I roomed with was in Wichita. In January of '38, I moved in with a young couple and their baby who I enjoyed. They were expecting another baby, too.

In Guthrie, we took some things that were required in school there that wasn't required in Wichita, such as Latin, algebra, and geometry. We had some stern, strict teachers, who made you learn or else you wouldn't pass.

## **The Run to Wichita**

My mother was a very good seamstress and she made most of my clothes, except coats and shoes. So I was considered the fancy little dresser in the country school and at church. What mother's friends didn't know or understand was that my mother's sisters, who had sons and no girls, would give my mother a lot of material to make me dresses. I could care less about clothes before I became a teenager. I had one dress pair of shoes and one school pair. In the 1920s through the 1940s, no girls wore pants to school or any public place.

As I said before, my grandmothers both passed before I was born. My mother's grandmother on her dad's side lived about four or five years after I met her. My grandfather and his mother was from Raleigh, North Carolina. My grandfather even rode and run in 1889 in Oklahoma and staked ground.

I wrote an article about my family in the *Logan County History: Oklahoma 1889 - 1977* book, Volume one. This book was the only one written about Logan county in 1978. It has 718 pages of history and is kept in the Oklahoma City capitol building.

My parents, as all others in Oklahoma and in the country, had a drought in the thirties. So in December 29, 1937, my parents moved to Wichita. I came the 15<sup>th</sup> of January 1938 after the first semester ended. At that time in Wichita when you had semesters ending, you had a week's vacation. There were A and B classes.

Our friends, the Nelsons, moved to the 1500 block of Ash and a cross was burned in their yard.

We only lived on the 1300 block of Minnesota one

month, because the house was too hard to heat up. We then moved in the 1200 block on Indiana, but it turned out to be too expensive, so we moved to the 1000 block on Ohio and lived there five years.

I grew up with other people that I met around Wichita that were very, very nice when I first came here. Black people here, in 1938, didn't have very many cars; I mean the young people didn't have cars. But the city buses ran in our neighborhood, which hardly crossed Minnesota.

It happened that I became friends to the people who had cars that I could ride around with. I rode around with Clarice Helm-Harris because she could drive her parents' cars. Her daddy was an attorney. Walter Morgan, who later became a music instructor could get his mother's car. I had other friends, the Bruces, Cecil Bruce and Richard Bruce, who could use their mother's car. They had a sister, named Lalene, who was the same age as I was. She could use the car, but they had a ruling at their place that only girls could ride when she drove and when the boys had the car, only boys could be in the car. So we had a lot of fun.

We had other friends that had cars and we would go to Hutchinson every Saturday or Sunday night. Whatever night we went, we'd come back that same night. One time it was eleven of us in one car and it was the boys' daddy's car. The driver missed a turn and the car almost turned over. Some were hurt. One girl hit her head on the windshield. It was too many of us in the car; we even had coffee cans some of us was sitting on. But we had fun. I don't know what we'd go to Hutchinson for, because there was really nothing to do. We'd go over there, dance a little bit, and come back. We had no

money during 1938, so we pooled our money to get gas to put in his daddy's car.

One girl and her parents always needed money for utilities, so once a month, they'd have what they called a "benefit dance" at their house. They'd roll up the rug in their living room and we'd all go to their house to dance.



*Melinda's Graduation in 1943*

Everybody knew you paid a dime to get in and that paid their utilities for that month. It'd be so crowded, you could hardly dance. You could walk any place at night by yourself, no one would bother you. Sometimes, we would have maybe a date or somebody walk with us. One of them was Vashti Lewis, Dr. Lewis' brother; he would walk home with me a lot of times. He wasn't my date but he

lived close to where I

lived. I'd ask, "Would you walk home with me so I can get home on time?" He would get almost to my house and he'd run on back. We just enjoyed visiting each other. You didn't have to be a boyfriend or girlfriend, you could just be friends.



*Melinda Banks in High School*

## **The Two Pembrooks**

I married at an early age, eighteen, and had my son, Pembroke G. Love, at the age of nineteen. I went back to high school and graduated from East High. My first husband was Pembroke Love, Sr. He was in a band called the Syncopaters, and played the saxophone and clarinet. I would go to band practice with him and they played at different little clubs. We enjoyed any type of music all the time. About 1946, my son started taking music. He took piano lessons, because his dad wanted him to be a musician. He learned to read the music a lot faster than he did play. I learned to play with him on the piano. He didn't particularly like it, because all his friends didn't do anything. They played ball when he would come out and play, because they didn't have a ball or a bat of their own. When he stopped playing, they had to stop playing. So he liked to play better than he did to go take music.

I was living as a married woman for a short time. We separated, because we were too young to get married. We did not get a divorce until after World War II. Pembroke never lived in Wichita after 1941 and we never got together but once. That was when he came to see his son after being in services a year or two. My son never saw his dad any more while he was alive. He remarried after the war, after 1946, and fathered another son, who lives in California and is ten years younger than our son.

## **When You Finish Doing That...**

I did domestic work. Then, I worked at Boeing during the war in 1943 until the summer of 1945 just before the war was over. I helped my dad, being an only child. We started to buying a home. I helped him to pay for it, because I was making a little more money than he was. He was working for the city and I was working for Boeing, so we paid for the house. My parents never asked me for money, but I always gave my dad money because he bought the groceries, and I gave my mother money for taking care of my son. She did the washing, and I did his ironing because I was kind of picky about his clothes. She told me I could cook on Sundays and she cooked through the week, so we had an arrangement, which worked.

I had to have my tonsils removed in late July, because I had had scarlet fever in the winter. I retired from work, instead of taking a leave of absence. Then, the war was over in August. I did a little other work. I thought that I didn't need to work for a while, because I had saved up my little money, but I learned different.

At 27-years-old, I decided to be a beautician. I had to have a job so I did a little domestic work. I didn't like domestic work because I didn't like people telling me, "When you finish doing that, would you do this?" I decided that I wanted to do something on my own, so I went to beauty school in 1947 in Oklahoma City. I stayed in the dormitory, and to help pay for my rent, I did the cooking for them. I made a lot of friends, and I was even a bride's maid in a girl's wedding. I hadn't known her very long, but we just became good friends.

I also took the beautician instructor's course, but I

decided I didn't want to be an instructor because it was too confining. I had to have more space and my shop had to be brought up to a certain code.

When I finished beauty school, I worked in Oklahoma City for a while. I mostly manicured because I didn't have a big clientele at the time. After six months in the shop, I moved back home.

I worked downtown when I first got back at Lewin's clothing store, and at Henry's on William and Broadway. I also worked in a cleaning shop, and was there longer

than the other places.

I also worked in two different shops and joined the beautician club. I enjoyed that. The first club I was in was all older women but they were a



*First Beautician Club*

lot of help and then I joined the younger club with the younger group. I also got a lot of traveling done by belonging to the Beautician Club. Our national conventions were held once a year and the regional



*Later Club Membership*

conventions that were held once a year. The nationals would always be in another city, which was maybe Miami, Chicago, New York and all those places. The regionals



*Melinda in 1950*

were around close because they were just Kansas and Missouri and Oklahoma; we didn't have to go very far to go there. I attended a lot of conventions and they were a lot of fun. There were so many advanced things you would learn at the conventions. Some of the girls that didn't go would say, "Oh, it's nothing, I don't want to go and spend my money just to see them do hair, I can do hair without

going." But you meet so many people. You're also learning a lot of short cuts in doing hair, tinting, cutting, styling, and in other beauty jobs.

## Remarriage and a New Shop

In 1950, I remarried, and I opened my own shop, which was small. My husband, Riley Banks, helped to build me a little shop at my mother's rent house. I only did hair on Saturdays and some evenings.

Ms. Mildred Ingram, one the elementary school teachers, told me that if I wanted a business, I would have to stop the cleaning business and just devote my time to doing hair. So I stopped working for the cleaning shop, which was a nice little shop. I kind of managed it, because the people who owned it were sick.

I started doing hair a full five days a week. Ms. Ingram was my patron for off and on, and I did her hair for what, I imagine, about 25 years. I also did Jessie Foust, Carlene Mason and Martha Penn-Hicks. All those were my old friends. One of my old patrons was Marie King; I did her hair for at least 30 years. I did Jeanette Jackson's hair for at least 30 years. She owned the Jackson Funeral Home.

The only reason I stopped was because my leg started hurting me so bad. I had an operation once and



*Melinda and husband, Riley Banks in 1950*

had my veins stripped in my legs. My friends waited on me and they came back. They fussed at me when I spoke of retiring. Ernestine Rocket even said, "Why don't you wait until you turn 70 before you retire?" I told her that that's the reason why I was retiring, I was 70 plus I didn't feel good. So I cut out doing hair five days a week and I started doing hair just three days on Wednesdays, Thursdays and Fridays part-time.

At first, I worked alone for ten years. Then, I had a very close friend named Othela Mason, who worked in my shop when I re-opened it with employees. I had two other people, Marie Jackson and Leroy Bell, who worked with me until I closed up my shop and moved home. I had a shop at home for over 20 years.

I was supposed to retire when my husband retired in 1981. We had a retirement party, but they begged me to keep on working so I worked until 1990. I've been retired for 12 years. I enjoyed doing hair because I like friends, and I like people.



*Retirement Party in  
August, 1981*

## We Traveled

I taught Sunday school and sang with groups in our church for years. My husband, son, and I all attended the same congregation.

My husband, Riley, and I started attending the regional and national meetings that took us to many states. We both liked to travel. I was fortunate that he liked to travel, because a lot of men don't. So we would travel to a lot of places, and were able to travel through 48 out of 50 states.

We've been to Seattle three times.

We went to Louisiana—I've been about four or five times, and, of course, Riley's been there a number of times since that was his dad's home.

Sometimes, we'd go to Oklahoma and other different little places.

We also took a New England Bus Tour in 1982, which took us to all of the New England states except Rhode Island. I was disappointed that we didn't get to Rhode Island. We were told that there wasn't anything to see there and we didn't have enough time. We left on a Sunday and got back on a Sunday. The New England states had the most beautiful sights.

We started out at New York at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel. I was so anxious to see it because I hadn't ever been in it and had heard about it.



*New England Bus Tour, 1982  
Ski Lifts in New Hampshire*

I went in, mailed a card, and looked around so I could say that I've been to the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel.

Then we left from there and toured New York all day. We stayed the night in New York and had dinner. Wherever you had dinner, you would always have breakfast the next morning. After that, you wouldn't see that place anymore, you'd continue on.

When we got to Vermont, we boarded a ferry. I was frightened because I couldn't figure out how all the buses, people, and cars would go on that same ferry without sinking. My husband kept saying, "Oh, they do this everyday. They do it all the time, so don't worry about it." The ride across wasn't that far, but it seemed like it took us a long time to get across.

We'd get off the bus every so often and walk around and stretch. The men that smoked, smoked. We went under those covered bridges—they had plenty of covered bridges. We went through the little building that housed the *Little Women*. We had read the story when we were



*New England Bus Tour, 1982  
N. Conway, New Hampshire*

growing up in school. We met so many people. My husband and I were the only two blacks on the bus of 43 people. Four of them were not just sightseers; one of them was the director, one was the bus driver, and two 23-year-olds, a young

man and young lady, were studying to be directors.

We became acquainted with all these new people and they were real nice. They wanted to sit with us to find out our life style, what we did, and the reason that we were able to take a vacation when they did. So, they'd ask my husband. One young guy found out that he and my husband were doing the same type of work. His mother-in-law had paid for their trip.

The travelers all came from different places. Most of them were from California. Two older couples were from Missouri and two ladies were from Texas. We just had a good time on that trip. One lady that I met still corresponds. She lives up in the Bay area of California and we're the only two that still corresponds as far as I know. She sent me pictures of her and her husband, otherwise I wouldn't know her if she came to the door today. But we enjoy visiting with each other through letters.



*Melinda and  
Acquaintance at  
Historical Building*



*Riley Banks in front of  
cruise ship*

The next year, we decided to go on a Caribbean cruise—it was a seven-day trip. We left here on the morning of December 4 with Roger Cornish, the news reporter on channel 12, and his group. We were the only blacks in that group of the twenty-three. We flew from Wichita to St. Louis and from St. Louis to Miami where we boarded

the ship.

There were over 2,000 on the ship. We met other blacks on the boat—not very many, but it was nice. We enjoyed the cruise, but comments were made that we ate too much. They fed us three meals a day. Although we didn't have to eat three meals a day, we ate. There were snacks on the ship between meals also. You could just eat all day if you wanted to. It was something that was memorable.



*On Ship with Captain*



*On Ship at Dinner Table*

After that trip, we didn't take anymore expensive ones. We went to Hawaii in the '70s, but it wasn't too much fun, so we didn't stay too long. We did go out to Pearl Harbor while we were there to see where the war began. We went on a little boat, and the water was real rocky



*Melinda and Riley  
Boarding Ship from Bus  
for Our Royal Caribbean  
Cruise*

that morning. The boat was just tossed about, but we enjoyed ourselves after we got over into the waters where it was calm and nice. I took lots of pictures. I have 15 albums and more pictures in boxes that's not in the album. I have so many pictures that you'll never get through going through them in a day.

My late husband and I started attending our church crusades and lectureships every year starting in 1989, after I stopped attending my beautician conventions. I had retired at this time.



The church crusades were held every two years in July. The first crusade for Christ that we attended was held in New Orleans, Louisiana. It turned out it was a two-fold trip. My husband had three first cousins and an aunt living there and his dad's home was 60 miles southwest of New Orleans. It's called Homer, and the home was still standing.

We went to the crusades and lectureships clear up until my husband's death. His last attendance was in Houston, Texas.

We went to New Orleans in 1989. In 1991, we attended in Detroit, Michigan. In 1993, we



*Riley and Melinda in San Diego, California at Night on the Boat*

attended one in Los Angeles, California. In 1995, we were in Atlanta. In 1997, we went to Indianapolis, Indiana and then to Houston in 1999. We just really enjoyed those crusades and lectureships. On each year, we would try to go, but we didn't make all of the lectureships.

We always tried to scatter these trips between the Buffalo Soldiers reunions. My husband was a buffalo soldier. The crusades and the Buffalo Soldiers would meet in July. But the lectureship would meet in March, so it was quite a reunion to go to all these meetings and meet all these different people.

One year, a dear friend gave us passes to go to both the Buffalo Soldier reunion, which was held in Portland, Oregon and to the Crusades because we couldn't afford to go to both. It was very nice for her to do this for us. It's expensive to stay in hotels in both places, to fly, and to eat. We flew to Houston, Texas to the Crusade for Christ and it lasted five days. We flew back and the Buffalo Soldier reunion was five days. That was the last reunion that my husband attended in 1999. The next one was held at the time when he was very, very sick and under the care of Hospice, so we didn't get to attend that one in Kansas City, Missouri.

In the year of 2000 my late husband, Riley Banks, and I were both selected to be Trailblazers. This was given by the Wichita, Kansas African-American Museum Incorporation, but sponsored by several businesses and professional people. My husband represented the Buffalo soldiers and he was very proud to be a part of the Trailblazers. He was ill at the time, but was still active. I was selected under social activities and religious participation. It was real nice to be chosen though Jesse Barnes, a well respected person in the community.

## **Volunteer Work**

Despite all this traveling, I did volunteer work. I enjoy volunteering because I love people and I hate being by myself. As a young girl attending high school, we belonged to different little organizations such as glee club and so forth.

I also belonged to the YWCA on Water Street as a youngster—it was all black. It began to get old and fade out and there wasn't very many attending, so the Caucasian ladies asked me about coming over and being on the board with them. I hadn't been on the board at the other one, but I said yes. When I went over and joined with them, I was reprimanded by some of my black ladies by saying it would degrade us and make us be not appreciated. They didn't like it very well. I was the only black on it at first, and then later on others came on the board, like Jo Brown and Ms. Grubbs.

At one time, I volunteered for a while at a care home. I had an aunt I was sole responsible for seeing after. She was my mother's sister, and she had no children. She got sick, so she had to go in a care home, as I couldn't keep her at home with me. She was the reason I got interested in volunteering at the home. It was owned by our Churches of Christ and called "Christ's Villa."

She lived in there 13 years, so all old people don't die just because they go to the care home. The reason they give up is because they're not visited to show that they're loved. I started by helping at parties and drove a van out to the Coliseum to the shows and things like that. I did a lot of volunteer work over there.

When I first volunteered, I told them that I would read for them, write letters, or something like that, or do hair. Naturally, they chose the hair doin'.

There was a beauty shop in the care home. The residents were a lot of fun. They'd be just sitting in their wheel chairs waiting on me when I got there. They were all Caucasian ladies, except for one black lady besides my aunt, who lived there. Although I did my aunt's hair, the other black lady wouldn't let me do her hair. She wore a wig.

One lady was kind of funny. She was wealthy and she paid her own bills and everything. She started coming to me soon as she found out that I did hair. I'd go out once a week and do hair on my day off. She made an appointment, but they told me, "You're not supposed to do her hair, because she can afford to pay for her hairdo's. She's been going to a beauty shop all along, and she can afford to pay for her hair." Since I was a volunteer, I didn't charge them.

My husband said "You don't tell her that she has to pay if you're volunteering, you just do her hair like you do the rest." So she gave me a quarter for a tip for doing her hair, she thought that was a big deal.

Sometimes she'd complain, "You didn't cut it just like I want it on this side."

I'd say, "You know, you don't have to come to me, you can go to the beauty shop where you...."

She'd say "Oh no, no, no. I want to come to you to get my hair done, I'll stay right here at the home."

I did hair until I got tired. My legs started bothering me and our church sold the building. It had so many

downs and problems until they sold the building. After my aunt died, I didn't work there as a volunteer very often.

I belong to other organizations. I also volunteer at the Arthritis Foundation. I am on the board. I have my five, ten, fifteen and twenty year pin. I've been on the arthritis board for about twenty-five years, but I'm now an honorary member. I do go to the board meetings sometimes.

I am also a lifetime member of the Buffalo Soldiers Ladies Auxiliary, Lifetime member of the Disabled Veterans, Lifetime member of the NACCC (National Association Civilian Conservation Corporation).

I volunteered with the girls who cooked for the homeless at our church. Elnida Johnson and others, cook for the homeless and started the program with feeding the homeless from our church. I enjoyed that when I was able to stand on my legs a lot.

Faver High School, the high school I attended in Oklahoma part-time began a school reunion. I was invited to attend, although I finished my high school education in Wichita. The first one that I attended was in 1976. I attended three or four others in Oklahoma and got a real interest in the reunions. Out of 300 and something students; there were only six to ten Blacks who attended from our class. Then, I went to my husband's class reunion and they had more blacks, about 15 or 20 attended his class reunion, but most of them were Caucasians—there were, at least 300 or 400 whites. They would come from everywhere and very few of our people here in town would attend.



*Melinda, first president of WAASHA (Wichita African-American High School Alumni)*

So then I got the big idea...why don't we have a reunion so we could see our friends when they come into town? We would run into our friends' parents or sisters and brothers and they'd say, "Did you see my sister when she was here or did you see my daughter when she was here?"

We'd say, "No." So then I said, "Let's have a school reunion, so we can see one another." I mentioned it to Clarice Harris, and to Maxine Walters, because I knew they were born here. I also mentioned it to

two or three others. I said, "Why don't we have a reunion, not a class reunion, but a school reunion?"

They said that it sounded good. I told them that I had attended two or three school reunions in Oklahoma for an all black school, so naturally everyone was all black there. They had busloads that would come from places like California. They'd chartered buses and come to the reunions. I enjoyed seeing old friends in Oklahoma.

No one did anything about it for about two or three years, so I finally decided that I'd get something done about this. I sent out invitations to sixteen couples who said they were interested in having a school reunion and twelve attended. That is how we got the Wichita African-American High School Alumni (WAAHSA) group started.

In December 1990, we started holding a monthly

reunion meeting at my house. George T. Johnson was kind enough to secure the Jackson's Mortuary Chapel for us to meet in with no charges for over one year. They were gracious enough to receive us. I was president for the first two years. We didn't have the reunion until '92, 'til we got organized and got people on the mailing list so we could invite them. It turned out that it was the largest reunion we've had. We had over 500 at the banquet, and we've never had that many more at a banquet. It was real interesting because so many of them hadn't seen each other for 50 years or more and they were just excited about it. Some of them haven't been back since because they go to family reunions and other things, a lot of them are sick and some of them have passed since then. But it was a good thing to have our reunion and I was so pleased because they decided to continue to have them.

## **My Son and Grandchildren**

My son retired last May of 2002. He worked at Boeing Aircraft for several years.

He and I drove to Las Vegas, Nevada and LA for his retirement and his birthday for a week.

Pembrook fathered five children: Tony C. Love of Denver, Colorado, Lamont Love of Los Angeles, California, Bruce T. Love of Wichita, Linda D. Love and LaTonya Love-Sloan of Wichita.

He also has five grandchildren and one little great granddaughter. His oldest grandson, Rylan Love, is in his twenties and has a little six-year-old girl. Adrian Love is 12 years old and has always been an A student and in gifted classes ever since he was in kindergarten. Brandon Love is eight-years-old and shy. These two are close to their granddad. Then he has a little eight-year-old granddaughter, named Lundun Love. She lives in California.

Pembrook has a half-brother who lives in Los Angeles, California. His name is Dana Love and he is ten years younger. They never met until their dad died and they both attended his funeral in California. My ex-daughter-in-law has also retired from teaching public schools. One of



*Son, Pembrook Love and his  
half-brother, Dana Love*

my granddaughters is attending college, and working on her degree although she is passed 30-years-old. One of my great-grandsons, Adrian, is close to me. He started attending church with me when he was two or three-years-old. Every Sunday morning, I would pick him up for Sunday school and worship, and I still do. Sometimes he still stays all night with me. When he was 10, I took him on his first train ride to Chicago, Illinois. We both enjoyed it.

I am proud of him. He has been contacted by Duke's University to take the scholarship test for college. He plans to take it in January of 2003.

## **A Widow on a Fixed Income**

Since my husband passed, I have a lot of paper work and bills of all kind each month and all these things became to be a job, an extra job.

I have spent so much money on cars. I totaled my 17-year-old plus Mercedes Benz car in July 2002. I paid for rental on a car while I was without one, then, I had to buy another car. I had other expenses that I had not planned on. It isn't easy when you are a widow on a fixed income.

I take ten different medicines per day. My son helps by paying for my yard cutting. I have been blessed that neither my son nor my grandchildren have called on me for money. They are all employed so far.

Since I lost my husband, people feel sorry for me or just want to see me. I have been invited to spend the holidays with relatives in Illinois, and friends in Tennessee. The year my husband died, I spent Thanksgiving with my cousins in St. Louis, Missouri. They did not want me to spend the holidays alone. We had a nice time. There was around 30 of us for dinner. I stayed there for four days.

I also went to Las Vegas for Christmas, staying there for five days. When I came home, I planned to take a trip in June to Chicago to visit other cousins.

I declined this year since I have been to California and hope to go to Detroit, Michigan in March next year to attend our church lectureship. I have been invited to Chicago for Thanksgiving this year, 2002, but changed my mind, and decided not to go. I've also been invited to Memphis, Tennessee for Christmas this year, but I don't plan on going.

I stay busy attending worship and Bible classes, weekly meetings, weddings, birthdays, anniversaries, and all things like that that keep me busy, so I won't get quite as lonesome. In July, I flew to Atlanta, Georgia to a Buffalo Soldiers Reunion. In all, I traveled several times that year and the year before. I enjoyed all of my trips.

In October 2001, I was invited to attend a memorial service in Washington, DC to honor my husband. I declined. It was too soon after 9-11 and the disasters in New York and Washington. I haven't flown any place since, but I have gone out of town. I have been invited to six weddings, bridal showers, and other things this summer.

It is still lonesome at home. My late husband and I lacked 13 days being married 50 years. I have my telephone, radio and TV, but that isn't like having someone in the house to talk with. Some days, I stay in the house for two or three days without going out.

Today, I couldn't forget that my dad died 30 years ago on November 24, 1972. He was 79-years-old. I'm not looking forward to April 17, when my mother passed, which will be 20 years this coming 2003. So now I only have a son, five grandchildren and several great-grandchildren. But I have a lot of sisters and brothers in the church and a lot of relatives and friends everywhere.

## **All of My Extended Family**

I had already stated that I was an only child, but I have a big extended family. I think I said that my mother raised my little cousin who lost his mother at two came to live with us and stayed until he went in service at 18. His name was Perry Foreman, Jr. and everyone thought he was my little brother, because he was six years younger than me. The girl cousin is named Beatrice Foreman and lived with us two years. She is now 80+ and lives in New Jersey. The other two boy cousins who came out every summer are deceased. One of the boys' wives, Vi, and I call each other every week. She lives in Tulsa, Oklahoma. I have cousins all over—some on my daddy's side of the family and some on my mother's side. We keep in touch with each other most of the time.

I also have adopted brothers, sisters, and children. Some of my adopted boys are: Dennis Henry and his family of five; Ricky Johnson, a single young man; Phillip Reed and his little son; Leonard Nelson and family. The girls are Dana Edwards, Vicki Forbes, Shawna Wooden, and Linda K. Crockett. I get a lot of hugs and kisses from my church sisters and brothers. My adopted brothers and sisters by my mother are: Charles Hicks, James Porter, Frank Wooden and Willie Hervey (deceased). Then, I adopted Mrs. Jeanette Jackson (deceased) as my other mother and her twin sons as my little brothers. One of them is deceased and one of their sons, Michael Jackson, is my adopted nephew. The Jackson family own Jackson's Mortuary. So my family isn't too small.

## **My Other Side of the Family**

My late husband, Riley, was the oldest child of twelve in his family. He lived at home until he was a teenager, then went into a working camp for teenaged boys and young men called the C.C.C. This was during the depression days, and they were paid a small salary once a month. Then he joined the Armed Forces. My husband's parents have been deceased for more than twenty years. His brother, Max Banks, lived in Omaha, Nebraska and died of natural causes. His brother, George Banks, and baby sister, Ollie Mae, were killed in a car wreck coming from an aunt's funeral in New Orleans, Louisiana.

Riley has two other brothers: Russell Banks of Wichita, and Ernest Banks of Colorado Springs, Colorado. He also has six sisters. Luetta Russell, Phyllis Jackson, Christine Barnes, and Geraldine Johnson all live in Wichita. Two sisters live in California: Barbara Jean Perkins of Los Angeles, and Thessaline Green of Rialto, California. I have a sister-in-law, Bernice Banks, who is like the sister I never had. I have a host of nieces and nephews on the Banks side and other sisters- and brothers-in-law. I have hundreds of church sister and brothers, and a lot of Caucasian friends. We belong to different organizations.



Army Banks/The Wichita Eagle

Riley Banks' responsibility and love for his parents convinced Melinda Newsom that he would treat her right.

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## Keeping things simple smooths life's pathway

By Laura Addison

The Wichita Eagle

**M**elinda and Riley Banks keep it simple. One way to remember important dates is to have them all the same.

That's why they celebrated their 40th anniversary Aug. 31 with Bible study friends at Chisholm Trail Church of Christ, the same day Melinda retired from Linda's Beauty Shop, her 40-year beautician business.

And Riley retired from the Santa Fe Railway on Aug. 31, 1981.

But then Riley never forgets an anniversary or holiday, according to Melinda. Riley's explanation is straightforward:

"Most men have the reputation of not remembering dates, so I have taken it upon myself to remember," said Riley.

The pair first met when they were students at East High School, where Riley carried Melinda Newsom's books. But it wasn't until nearly a decade later, after each had been married, that their paths crossed again.

Their parents all went to the same church, and Melinda and Riley went, too.

"He had a car, and he

### LOVE STORY

would take me to work and carry me to lunch," she said.

He impressed her with his responsibility. "And he loved his parents," a sign he would treat her well, she said.

As for Melinda's credentials, Riley said, "She went to church, so I thought maybe I would give her a try." He found her to be "persistent and loyal."

During the next 40 years, they traveled many miles together, from free train trips when Riley worked for Santa Fe to a Caribbean cruise. In July, they attended the buffalo soldiers convention, 9th and 10th Horse Cavalry Association groundbreaking at Fort Leavenworth.

Riley has continued to work part time since his retirement, and Melinda has combined her beauty shop business with volunteer work. She is a member of the board of directors of the Arthritis Foundation and on the auxiliary of the Christ Villa Nursing Home.

Together they plan to keep on traveling and do visitations of shut-ins for the church.



*Melinda Today*

To God be the glory,

*Melinda Banks*

Melinda L. Banks

