shelves and collect dust, they help nobody.'...My dad said in firm terms, 'The next time I ask you, tell me what you've read.'"

After that day, Law read the books everyday and he shared his newfound knowledge with his father whenever he asked.

"I learned about the coal and steel production. These were things that my dad did not know; he could not read or write and I did not know that at the time."

Law took his diligence with him in college. Back then, his parents paid $480 a year for his education. His ethics stayed with him while sitting through more than 20 grueling job interviews until he got his chemist position. Even now, well into retirement, his past still steers his future within the NAACP.

"My view is that as long as there is a need — and there is a tremendous need —to address the many issues [in] our community, I will be here to help," Law says. "It is not only something that I am passionate about; I feel it is my obligation to give back. I appreciate the struggle that I've been through and I appreciate the good things that have happened. I'm still available to help improve the lives of our people, but all people."

— DeShuna Spencer

Elmore Bolling with his wife, Bertha Nowden Bolling, in a 1939 photo.

COURTESY THE BOLLING FAMILY

"Nobody cares or feels responsible for [what] happened to our people. Everybody who stands up is shot down."

The Lynching of Elmore Bolling

In her autobiography, *My Story*, Rosa Parks wrote briefly about the death of Elmore Bolling. In her notes as secretary of the Montgomery NAACP, Parks wrote that the death of the prominent Black businessman was the result of an alleged interracial tryst.

But Bolling's daughter, Josephine Bolling McCall wanted to set the record straight and honor her father on the 60th anniversary of his death by planting a marker where she said he was lynched on Dec. 4, 1947, because he was a successful Black man in rural Alabama.

There were so many reasons for McCall to abandon her dream. The National Register of Historic Places refused to add the site to its registry because no original structure existed — such as the family's white wood-plank store bearing E-L-M-O-R-E B-O-L-L-I-N-G in large red letters on its side.

The Alabama Historical Association said "no" to placing a marker on U.S. Highway 80 because it considered the circumstances of Bolling's death to be speculative, McCall said, and the state wouldn't give her clearance to put a marker on the right of way without the historical commission's clearance.

McCall wouldn't give up. Her family raised $2,700 for the marker and asked the Black man who now owns her family's land to grant them space for the tribute. On Dec. 2, about 200 people attended the marker dedication in Lowndes County, including judges, city officials and historians.

That day was one she will always remember, McCall said, just as she recalls her father's eyes, staring blankly back at her from a lifeless body pelted by seven bullets and lying in a ditch yards away from the store Bolling owned in Lowndesboro, Ala.

She was only 5 years old when two White men in an Oldsmobile chased down her father's 16-wheeler truck and killed him not far from the store he owned. McCall, her brothers, ages 7 and 12, and her 32-year-old mother had been inside the store at the time. Bolling's family ran to him, but it was too late.

"Seeing him lay there in the ditch with his eyes open, that's the memory etched in my mind," McCall says. "I cried so much that my mother eventually sent me to a neighbor's house and told them to put me to bed."

Now a retiree living in Montgomery, Ala., McCall grew up hearing about her father's charitable acts from folks in Lowndesboro and Montgomery, where her mother, Bertha Nowden Bolling, moved her family in with relatives. McCall said he was a philanthropist who provided jobs for poor Blacks, and accepted barter and credit for store purchases. He operated his own Underground Railroad, whisking away sharecropping families who weren't allowed to leave their farms until their endless debts were paid.

Bolling inherited his business sense and many head of cattle from his own father, Braxton Bolling, McCall said. Bolling, who never learned to read or write, earned the respect of Whites and Blacks because he owned not only a general store, but also land and a fleet of trucks he used to transport livestock, crops and people. He hauled livestock to a cattle yard in Montgomery for Whites who befriended him and accompanied him to obtain loans to purchase vehicles and additional transportation work.

Through research and interviews, McCall has come to believe her father's prosperity was the impetus for his murder, though one of the accused men later told a Montgomery newspaper that Bolling offended his wife on the telephone.

McCall is one of seven Bolling children — two girls, five boys. One of her brothers confessed to her that his heart had been heavy with the very thought that his dad had insulted a White woman.

"All these years he suffered. Because our father taught his sons to be so respectful to women, it hurt him to think our father would insult any woman, much less a White woman," McCall says. "That's why I am so glad I started doing the research. Now everybody knows the truth, that my father was killed because of his prosperity."

Justice was never served in Bolling's case. A grand jury issued a "no bill," or insufficient cause for indictment, and didn't indict even the man who confessed to the murder in a newspaper article. McCall said the family later learned that a reason given for the injustice was that no one signed a warrant against the killers.

"The title of just about every book dealing with the legacy of African Americans might very well be titled, 'No Bill,'" says Richard Bailey, a Montgomery author and historian who attended the marker dedication. "That's the most poignant statement you can make about the Black experience in this country, because nobody cares or feels responsible for the instances that happened to our people. Everybody who stands up is shot down."

Bolling stood his ground and wouldn't run, McCall said, even when a wealthy White landowner warned him of the murder plan days before the lynching.

Even when Bolling's White informant offered to help him escape danger and promised to send his family to him later, McCall said her father refused to flee.

"My father said, 'I am not running. I am not doing anything to anybody. All I'm doing is making a living for my family.' Ten days after that he was killed," McCall says.

On the day her father was killed, McCall said her brother, who was 12 then, noticed suspicious behavior.

"He said a deputy sheriff came by the store that day and asked all kinds of questions about my dad," McCall said. "Then 15 minutes later two White men came by in an Oldsmobile and asked the same kind of questions. My brother became leery and took a stick and wrote the tag number down in the dirt. But when the sheriff came by later, he wouldn't even look," says McCall.

McCall hopes to finish a book she is writing about her father's legacy. In it she'll retell how Bertha Nowden Bolling calmly removed her husband's personal belongings from his still body and how Bolling's 12-year-old son tried desperately to take his father's boots off in case there was any truth in the old adage that a man couldn't go to heaven with them on.

"We need more family members like Jo to make the necessary sacrifices in time, energy and money to bring forward these kinds of stories," says Paul Mohr of the Alabama Historical Commission's Advisory Group for Black Heritage Council. He also attended the marker dedication.

"We as African Americans have had our history lost, stolen and misconstrued. There is an African proverb about the lion and the hunt. Until the lion writes his own history, the story of the hunt will only be told by the hunter," Mohr says.

— Denise Berkhalter

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