

Days of Yesterdays, Esmont Community Center

Stories of the elders as told to Laura Piedmont, R.N. and Susan Hastings, R.N.

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The Bus Story

by Ruth Ward



Back in the fifties, I believe it was 1954, I boarded a local bus that ran from Charlottesville to Scottsville, Virginia. Laws regarding where we could sit on a bus had recently been passed. In other words, Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King and many others took a stand and won.

I boarded the bus, paid my fare and proceeded to take a seat about five rows back from the front. Immediately, a white couple behind me wanted my seat. There were seats in the back of me, but they refused to go to the rear. I refused to move. I had an opportunity to exercise my civil rights and had no intentions of moving.

The bus driver went outside and called the cops over. They came running in with these big wooden billy clubs raised in the air and came right to me. I was terrified, but determined to stay put. Thank God, I never had to speak a single word because, after they rushed in towards me, they suddenly realized the law was on my side. They told the driver there was nothing they could do, because I hadn't broken the law.

Well, the driver was really ticked off. He had his teenage son with him and the son indicated he was coming home later that evening. The driver said "no, you're coming with me. I might need you for something." And he turned and looked at me. I was really scared to death.

In the meantime, Dorothy Jordan (now, Dorothy Harris), a girl from Esmont who was sitting behind me moved up and sat beside me and the white couple took the seat behind us.

The bus pulled off, headed for home. I just knew in my mind that the driver's son was going to do something to me when I got to my stop in Esmont. At each stop the bus driver's son who was standing up front, got off the bus before each passenger, and after the passenger exited, he would get back on. When I got near my stop, I pulled the cord, and the bus stopped. I got off, so sure I would be hurt in some way. But, after getting off, I walked a few steps from the bus, (my back to the bus and my legs feeling like rubber), I waited a few seconds, and the next sound I heard was the door of the bus closing and the bus pulling off. "Whew!"

My rubbery legs nearly gave out, only this time in pure delight, because I was not hurt. I thanked God, and proudly turned and headed for home.

I never told my parents about this incident. I was afraid, since they were from another school of thought, they might not understand.