

Garfield Carr
G. Jackson Burney Community Service Award Winner
November 23, 2016

It is a special joy for me to get to talk to you about my friend, Garfield Carr.

Garfield was born at Lowrance Hospital in Mooresville and lived in Charlotte for a few years of his infancy, but he is a true son of Davidson, arriving here before entering elementary school, and here he has stayed, giving of himself in extraordinary ways to his community.

The biggest influence on his life has always been his family. He loved going to his Grandma Minnie and Grandpa Johnny's house, a safe-haven for Garfield and his eight siblings. His parents, Evelyn and Orlando, are his heroes. Their home was fun, but disciplined. Since both parents worked full time, they taught the children to take care of each other and to be self-sufficient. They learned how to do everything for themselves – cook, clean, sew, and run a household. Evelyn is quite proud that all of her sons, not just the daughters, can iron like professionals, putting sharp creases in their slacks. I'll bet you can see those creases today!

Evelyn and some of those siblings are here today. Evelyn, also a Burney Community Service Award winner, would you please stand, along with, in order, Orlando, Jr., Patricia, Garfield, Mary Francis, Elizabeth, Felton, Gerald, Andre, and Kavin. And, even a foster brother, Robert. Would those of you who are related to Garfield, also please stand. Thank you for being here today.

They have always been close, starting early as they visited relatives' houses, celebrated birthdays, and played together. Fun was the order of the day, with freedom to ride their bikes anywhere in town and pick up games of baseball and football in a local field. They made their own games, like Double Dutch and hopscotch. His friends from those days were from all parts of town and they went back and forth to each other's houses, friends like Davidson locals John Woods, Truscott Rhodes, and Phil Dishman. Neighbors kept an eye out for all the children of the community, so it was hard to be too disobedient.

Garfield began working at Norton's Barbershop when he was 12, polishing shoes, to make a little spending money to buy magazines and clothes and to support his comic book habit, especially for Dick Tracy, Superman, and Archie and his pals. How he wishes he still had those comic books! In downtown Davidson, he could go to the grocery store, Wilson's Clothing Store, and Mary Mac's Dress Shop, but only through the back door, sitting on the colored side. But the Soda Shop was more welcoming, so he went there often. He could walk in the front door. But he couldn't mingle and had to sit in a certain area. In those days, he had to know the rules and live by them.

One of Garfield's favorite activities was to attend Mrs. Copeland's Bible Study on Sunday afternoon at her boarding house, tailored mostly for black children. She would have them memorize Bible verses and after so many verses, she presented them with a Bible with their names inscribed. To this day, he recites his favorite verse, Psalms 23, by heart.

Garfield always liked school, and he attended the Ada Jenkins School, the segregated elementary school, from the first grade through the eighth. He fondly remembers early teachers who took an interest in him, such as Mrs. Baucom, Mrs. Brown, and Mrs. Murphy, who were strict but fair. They helped him understand the value of education. And he was the spelling bee champ for years!

Garfield began his high school years at Torrence Lytle School in Huntersville, now the home of the David B. Waymer Center. It, too, was segregated. Then came a time that shook the community and worried Garfield and his friends, the integration of North Mecklenburg High School when Garfield was in the 10th grade. He and his friends, one of them known well to our Davidson community, Ruby Houston, rode the bus from Ada Jenkins to Torrence Lytle and on to North Meck. Those were uncertain and scary days for them because they had no idea how they would be received. They were still segregated on busses, and experienced meanness when they got off the bus, suffering incidents of spitting and name-calling.

Initially, integration occurred only to a certain point, because many of the classes were still predominantly white or black, and Garfield began to feel that they were not being taught in the same way as the white students. He saw that they had to prove themselves over and over again. His homeroom teacher, Davidson resident Mary Lou Daggy, reached out to Garfield and his friends, and offered to stay after school with them or for them to come to her house for extra study. She wanted them to succeed. Garfield believes that Mr. Hough, the principal, handled integration in a better way than most principals in the area, preventing the riots that tore apart other schools and helping kids get to know and accept one another.

By Garfield's second year at North Mecklenburg, people came to realize that they all had the same hopes and dreams. There were individual skirmishes but nothing that was organized or widespread. He and his friends worked hard to change the mascot from a rebel carrying the rebel flag, with the school song being "Dixie," to the Vikings. It is a point of pride for Garfield that the valedictorian of his class was an African American woman, Monique Shuford, who later became a judge!

After high school graduation in 1968, Garfield attended Central Piedmont Community College and studied business administration and took classes in paralegal training. Romance and marriage intervened before he completed his associate's degree, but he always used what he learned in those classes wherever he worked. He married Inez in 1973 and together they parented three children: Ted, Leslie, and Roderick Graham. He and Inez are happy to be grandparents now, too. After marriage, Garfield went to work for Reeves Brothers and took night courses at Mitchell Community College, receiving certifications as a tax preparer and as a pharmacy technician.

Garfield worked in the areas of environmental safety, health, and inventory control for Asmo in Statesville and later for Daetwyler in Huntersville. Now, he works for Cashions' Quick Stop, helping at all four stores, as needed, because he is so trusted.

From 1985 to 2005, Garfield served as a Davidson Town Commissioner. He followed his sister, Pat, who served one term on the board, because he felt called to give back to the

community he loved. He saw that growth was heading to Davidson and wanted to help shape the town in positive ways. He served on the police advisory committee, sought new planning ideas to keep Davidson a sustainable small town, was determined to find ways to involve citizens in the decision-making process, and supported the Ada Jenkins Center, new parks and programs, affordable housing, open space planning, and sound fiscal policy. He also served on Our Towns Habitat Board, helped found the Boys and Girls Club, and acted as an elder and peace maker at his beloved Davidson Presbyterian Church.

In 1995, when I was first elected to the Board, I saw the respect with which Garfield's colleagues treated him. When he spoke, they listened. When they gathered together, it was usually around Garfield. I wanted to be a part of that circle. One of the happiest days of my life is when Garfield came up to me after a few months of my time on the board, and said, "How are you, sister?" He called me sister! And ever since that moment, Garfield has been my brother. My true brother.

Connie Wessner also saw Garfield's importance to the balance and decency of the Board:

I'm grateful for the opportunity today's celebration offers to let you know how deeply you influenced me as a member of the Town Board. I didn't land here nearly 20 years ago when Dave and I moved in, plotting from the get-go that I'd run for town office. Far from it. But I did very much want to find a way to sink roots deep in our adopted home.

That fall, a newfound friend urged me to attend a Town Board meeting as a way to get my bearings. What I watched that night, and on many subsequent nights those first years we were here, thrilled me. Here sat 6 people who were daring, who were innovative, who were committed to the pursuit of something far deeper than their own interests. I hadn't dreamed I'd land in a small town that was playing with cutting-edge policy. It made this unemployed policy wonk deliriously happy, and it gave me hope that I would truly find a space to grow here.

And so I became a faithful spectator at Town Board meetings. Back then, you six were a fascinating blend of personalities. I should acknowledge that what I'm about to say next leaves little separation between me and a garden-variety stalker. I promise you there's truly no need for a restraining order.

Garfield, I was mesmerized by the way you did the job. So few words and yet every measured word you chose to utter had impact. Your colleagues stopped the banter and listened when you spoke. And they often looked eager to coax you into the conversation. I knew to lean forward and take note when you'd smile, pause, shake your head a little and then toss a little wisdom at all of us. You had such a compelling way of pointing out the missing perspective and asking everyone at the table to take it in and consider it and respond to it. That easy-going, take-it-or-leave-it approach made it clear there was no leaving it alone. And your colleagues knew it.

Back then there was some pretty fine work that happened in this room. It gave us the Town we have today. When many years later, I found myself sitting at the same table it wasn't hard to think about how I wanted to do the job. I just thought of you in that seat and then

tried to measure my words in the same way I'd seen you do. I didn't imagine for one minute I'd ever be as adept at it as you, but yours was the standard to which I aspired.

And so, I stand here today, awed by all that I didn't know about you then, grateful for all that you made possible in this sweet little Town of ours, and forever indebted that you dropped some bread crumbs for someone who never planned to walk the same path.

Thank you, Garfield. I'd have been utterly lost without you.

It is no surprise that, in recent years, Garfield has continued to find ways to serve others. A few of friends from the North Meck class of '68 stayed in touch and they began to reach out to others in the class to reflect on their shared history in segregated schools and to seek racial harmony. They met for several months and decided to make it official. They call themselves the Journey Class of 1968. Of course, Garfield was elected their first president, something they persisted in asking him to accept. Their mission statement says that they will work, "To reconnect and celebrate our intertwined history with the intent to serve the community, foster friendships, and create a positive energy with collaborative efforts of philanthropy."

So, Garfield, you have strived to bring together the white and African American communities in Davidson, proving that we all share this town and should not be separated by race. You have lived the values instilled in you by your parents to work hard, look out for others, be self-sufficient, study, and be aware socially and politically. Because you showed courage throughout your life to tackle the most complicated issues without fear or hesitation, because you approached your town work with love for people from all walks of life, all ages, and all races, because of your uncommon common sense and integrity, and because you are a quiet leader, a trusted friend, and an exemplary role model, we are proud and happy for you to be the 2016 recipient of the G. Jackson Burney Community Service Award.