

Beverly Parker, Re-Entry Student



A few months ago my daughter, who lives in New York City, insisted that I read *Project Girl* by Janet McDonald. I was able to borrow the book from the UCSC McHenry Library and I now understand why she was so adamant that I read the novel. It is the story of my youth. Janet McDonald, a black woman like me, was born within a year of my birth. She was raised in the projects adjacent to the one in which I grew up by parents from the south like mine. She speaks of the 'White Flight' from the projects to the suburbs that affected the education and service level subsequently provided to the neighborhood in which we both lived. She was bused to a predominately white high school neighboring the predominately white high school that I was bused to. She expressed similar mixed emotions about being a marginalized person as I felt.

I was born in 1952 in New York City to parents who had been part of the Great Migration of blacks from the south to the north in the first half of the twentieth century. My parents migrated from Memphis, Tennessee after my dad's return from serving in the South Pacific following World War II. They were in search of a better life to raise a family far away from the Jim Crow south. We moved into the Fort Greene Projects in Brooklyn, New York where all three of my younger siblings were born. Being the oldest child was a responsibility that I was not able to take lightly. Living in the projects was challenging. A number

of my young neighbors would tease me about going to a white school and sounding like a 'White Girl.' Because I was bused to a white high school I was made fun of by many of the young people in the project and it was also difficult to fit into the white world in which I was being educated. The marginalization I felt being between both worlds and not of either was at times very painful although I did learn to adapt more easily to situations. It could also be a dangerous place to live but my parents tried hard to shield us from the physical violence. They wanted all their children to excel in school and go on to college, which is what we all did. That is where my path and the path of my siblings divided.

I was always very interested in politics and social issues. Being a child of the 60's contributed greatly in that direction. My parents sat in the back of the bus and were not able to vote until they moved to New York City. I registered to vote on my eighteenth birthday and have voted ever since. I remember the feelings of exhilaration and hope of self-realization as a person of color in America as a result of the Civil Rights Movement. I also remember the sense of loss and defeat with the deaths of President Kennedy, Dr. King, Malcolm X,

and Robert Kennedy. I worked on the campaigns of a number of elected officials including the first black congressman from New Jersey, Congressman Donald Payne, who still serves after more than two decades. I have been an active member of a number of women's organizations including the National Association of Black Businesswomen and the League of Women Voters.

For twenty years I worked for Trans World Airlines, beginning on my twentieth birthday. I dropped out of college the following year to be a wife and mother but was able to achieve a degree of success in business. I became the first female, the first black person, and the youngest supervisor at J.F.K. Airport. I was subsequently promoted to a training instructor position, public relations and finally regional sales and marketing before taking early retirement in 1992. In 2001, following 9/11, the travel industry suffered immensely. I found myself a victim of downsizing and out of a job. As I mentioned previously, my path and that of my siblings divided. All three of my siblings have received at least a masters degree and my youngest

brother has a PhD in engineering. In spite of all my achievements in business and in raising a magna cum laude graduate of Smith College class of 1995, I have always felt less accomplished because I lack a college degree. More than thirty years had lapsed since I had last attended college. But, with fear in hand, I returned to college. Being a student at De Anza College was an enormous adjustment. I worked hard and it paid off. My GPA was 3.79. I became a member of the Student Senate, the African Ancestry Association, Diversity Advisory Council, Events and Student Rights committees. As a Senator, I was able to coordinate a campus wide voter registration drive prior to the 2004 presidential election that yielded more than 2000 new voters. I also worked for the re-entry program to help other returning students like myself with issues unique to more mature students. Last spring quarter I was able to participate in a very rewarding study abroad program in Paris, France. At my graduation from De Anza College, I received the President's Award and the African Heritage Award from De Anza College.

The University of California Santa Cruz was my first transfer choice because of its fine reputation as a research institution. I am an American Studies major and I am interested in research studying people of the African diaspora. I am particularly interested in the cultural anthropological and ethnographic comparative studies of peoples enslaved by various European colonizers. Specifically comparing peoples in French and Portuguese colonies of the Caribbean, Central and South America as opposed to people enslaved in North America. I have applied to the Education Abroad Program and am hoping to travel to Brazil in the fall. I am presently studying Portuguese in preparation for the Afro-Brazilian Cultural Studies program, which is an important part

of the research that I would like to do in the future. I would like to continue onto graduate school and to receive a PhD so that I may teach at university.

My education at this point in my life is an important blessing. The hope for self-development and self-realization I felt as a young person in the 60's and 70's has been revived. I am motivated to learn and grow so that I may possibly make a difference in the self-development and self-realization of some young 'Project Girl' of today or tomorrow.