



Coming full circle

By Marilyn Cummins
Photo by Carole Patterson

Almost 53 years ago, 15-year-old Raymond Hayes was coming out of Sunday school at St. Luke Methodist Church at 110 N. Second St. in Columbia when he lingered a moment on the sidewalk. He just wanted a look at the new pastor, Rev. John R. Guyton. It was a fateful decision for the young man, who says he was there mostly so he could play in the church's basketball program.

"He came straight for me, shook my hand and invited me to stay for the morning service," Raymond says. "To my surprise, in walked his wife and three daughters, Celestine being the youngest. After that I never missed church. She was just so friendly and pretty."

The two became friends and walked everywhere, even turning down rides so they could walk and talk together.

"I didn't have a pickup line, so I talked about church, football and cars," he says.

She says, deadpan, "I learned a little about football and cars."



Newlyweds Celestine and Raymond in 1965



Celestine Guyton, Hickman graduate 1960

This year will mark 45 years of married life for the couple and 30 years at St. Luke United Methodist Church together, with Raymond as pastor and Celestine as a certified lay speaker, director of music, organist, pianist, choir director, superintendent of Sunday school and more. Both are long-time Columbia Public School teachers (he retired in 1997), and both have been honored for their positive impact on the community — she with the Columbia Values Diversity Award in 2002 and he with the MLK Jr. Award from the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Association in 2005.

Breaking down the walls

The Guyton family moved from St. Joseph, Mo., to Columbia in 1957, three years after the Supreme Court decision that struck down segregation in public schools. Celestine spent her freshman year there at Central High, which had been integrated since 1954. She had excelled in and outside the classroom, especially using her talents honed as part of a very musical family.

In Columbia, she had a choice to attend the all-black Frederick Douglass High or Hickman High, recently opened to black students. She chose Hickman.

Celestine quickly won the hearts of her new teachers and classmates and was named Outstanding Sophomore at Hickman that first year and a junior class officer the next. One highlight of her junior year came at a time of great sadness; shortly after she appeared on local television singing "Sweet Little Jesus Boy" to promote the Hickman talent show, her father died, but not before he had flamed Raymond's desire for the ministry.

In her senior yearbook, the 1960 *Cresset*, Celestine's brilliant smile stands

out on page after page: as one of the nine "ideals" elected by all the girls at Hickman (she was "Dependability"), as secretary of the Modern Music Masters honorary (standing next to Vice President Kenny Lay), in the National Honor Society, musicals, the Verse Choir, the Leaders Club, the newspaper staff, Franklin Club, Blue Triangle.

In the back of her '59 yearbook is an entire autograph page titled "Reserved for Raymond Hayes" in Celestine's handwriting. The new junior at Hickman filled the page with his devotion, remarking on her "sincerity and willingness to help others without thought of self-glorification."

Nearly 20 years later, Roger Gafke would write this of her in "A History of Public School Education in Columbia": "The first black student at Hickman to achieve community-wide recognition for her work was Celestine Guyton. Her achievements ... focused the attention of many of the white persons in the community, some for the first time, on the individuality of the black student, thus breaking down the tendency for stereotyping of black students."

A different path to Hickman

Raymond's parents moved back to Columbia from Cairo, Ill., when he was a baby — the fifth of 10 Hayes children in a three-room row-house apartment on First Street. "We crammed in, all 10 children, with blankets on clotheslines dividing the bedroom between the girls and the boys." His father was a cook at the Virginia Café, the Greyhound Coffee Shop and other restaurants; his mother stayed at home, took in laundry and later worked as a maid at Stephens College.

Raymond and his siblings attended Douglass, where he was an honors student, on the football, basketball and track teams

and, for a short time, a color guard in the band. But he also joined in the push for integration and took part in marches and sit-ins. Taking to heart the call to "Integrate Now!" Raymond shocked his parents and teammates by walking to the Board of Education Office and requesting a transfer to Hickman for his junior year. (Celestine already being there was a major motivation, he admits, smiling.) The Hickman guidance counselor took him to the football field to meet the coach, who invited the starting tackle from Douglass to join the team.

Although he had to sit out the first football season as a transfer student, he still practiced with the team knowing he could not play. Raymond became the first-ever black athlete at Hickman when he played basketball the second semester. The following fall, No. 62 suited up, started several games and lettered in varsity football as a Kewpie, another first. Only once did he have an issue with a teammate — who "mouthed off and used the magic word" — but the rest of Raymond's white teammates stepped in to defuse the situation and stop a fight. "They didn't want me to get kicked off the team," he says.

Acceptance at school; rejection elsewhere

Things were harder outside of school, where Raymond's choice "sort of put me in a no man's land. I had to go to school at Hickman each day then come back into the neighborhood where I was no longer accepted by some at my old school."

All in all, Celestine and Raymond believe they had a more comfortable time at Hickman than did the 113 black students forced to go to the school en masse when Douglass High School was eliminated at the

end of the 1959-60 school year. "We chose to go," Raymond says.

Field trips were a problem, however. He recalls a school trip to Fulton when a downtown restaurant refused to serve him and other black students, and "many of the white students said, 'If you can't eat, we won't eat either.'" When Celestine worked for Columbia Parks & Recreation as a playground director, arrangements were made to take her students from Benton Elementary — all white — on a field trip to a private facility in Moberly. When they arrived, the manager saw her and said, "We don't have blacks here." They salvaged the trip by going to a public park.

"Because of our presence, we put people in positions they hadn't been in before," she says.

Upheaval of the old neighborhood

The late '50s in Columbia brought urban renewal and an upheaval, especially in Raymond's life.

"It was widespread and devastating," he says. Churches, homes of both affluent and poor, familiar businesses were all torn down — very distinct neighborhoods gone. Even the rats were displaced from the demolished salvage yard on Park Avenue; Celestine vividly remembers watching them run across Providence Avenue as the couple walked home from Hickman.

"All the old landmarks were gone," Raymond says. "When my brother came home from military service, he couldn't find us. Urban renewal had changed the landscape. All the open areas, the play areas, the trees were all gone. Where were the kids supposed to play?"

The sky on fire

Fast-forward a few years to 1968. Curators Scholar Celestine has graduated from the University of Missouri with her B.S. in Spanish and French with a minor in music, then her master's in Spanish literature, including two summers studying in Mexico. Raymond has his B.S. in education in social studies from MU, attended the Missouri School of Religion and married the love of his life at St. Luke on Oct. 9, 1965. The couple is in Kansas City, Mo., he in St. Paul School

of Theology and pastor at St. Andrew Methodist Church while she teaches Spanish, French and music at Southeast Junior High and then writes the curriculum as the first Spanish teacher for the new Martin Luther King High School.

On April 9, 1968, five days after the assassination of Dr. King, Kansas City high-school students and others marched on City Hall to protest Missouri-side schools staying open while Kansas City, Kan., schools were dismissed in honor of his funeral. For reasons still unknown, police fired on the marchers with tear gas as they listened to the mayor and other speakers. City officials and leaders of the black community later held a rally at the "old" KC Athletics Baseball Park, Raymond says, "and we thought we had everything under control."

Later that night, they got a call from his worried parents saying the National Guard had been called from Columbia to help quell riots in Kansas City. "I looked out the rear door of the parsonage, and the sky was lit with fire," Raymond says. Three days of rioting and fires left six dead and 312 buildings in Kansas City damaged, news reports say. "It was a war zone."

They hoped for calmer times when Raymond was appointed to Willson United Methodist church in Cleveland to start a new congregation and an academy to train clergy. Celestine took a position as Spanish instructor at Cleveland State University. However Cleveland had just had its own riot, and things were still very tense. Eventually armed security guards were necessary when the church was open at night.

"It was a crazy time," Raymond says. The worst was when his dear friend — the church's treasurer, lay leader and father of seven children — was shot and killed by

teenagers trying to rob him as he made a bakery delivery. "It just wiped me out." Celestine, 9 months pregnant, delivered Walker, the first of their three sons, the day after the funeral.

Life comes full circle

In 1972, both secured teaching positions and moved home to Columbia, where sons Damon and Sean were born. Raymond taught social studies and was an assistant football coach at Jefferson Junior High and retired in 1997. Celestine taught as music specialist at Ridgeway Elementary and other elementary schools. She's in her 38th year at Ridgeway, in her 28th year of teaching Suzuki piano to students ages 3 to 17 in her home studio and in her 32nd year of hosting their large extended-family celebration on Christmas Eve.

In 1980 their home church, St. Luke, came calling and finally got Raymond, who was still teaching full-time, to agree to serve as pastor for a few months. Those few months turned into 30 years. A new church building was completed in 1993.

The Hayeses call their mixed congregation at St. Luke a "rainbow coalition," known for its strong mission of feeding the poor, its great cooks and its open door to all who need help. Community service includes after-school tutoring, an HIV/AIDS Care team, Loaves and Fishes and other projects. They value their relationship with Centro Latino, the recent 2010 Columbia Values Diversity group winner; they desire to reach out to the many African refugees in the community.

"The spirit of St. Luke is really a spirit of sharing and giving," Raymond says. Celestine, who lives that spirit every day at church, in her classroom and her studio, nods in agreement. **CHL**



Raymond's portrait as Hickman's first black football player, 1959-60



While a student at MU, Raymond ran a day camp at the Blind Boone Community Center.