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WHAT A PAIR!



IN OUR ETHNICALLY MIXED BUT RATHER MONOTONOUS neighborhood, there was no way my parents could blend in. My mother was glamorous and sophisticated to me, in complete contrast to the mothers of my playmates. I knew all about her high schooling in California and college in Chicago. She'd even traveled extensively in the United States and to Mexico and Canada before marrying my father. She always said that besides marrying our father and having us, living in San Diego was the happiest time in her life.

I can't think of one thing my parents had in common with our neighbors, other than concern for their children. But even then, their interests diverged. My mother and father wanted to protect us as much as possible from the consequences of racism and, for them, higher and higher education was the key. They wanted to ensure that I, as the girl, was prepared to make a living with or without a husband. The neighbors just wanted their daughters to get married and their sons to get a decent-paying job with benefits right after high school. Besides the racial chasm that separated them, there was a major "what's it all about" breach.

My parents were considered one of the most striking couples in town, and heads turned wherever they went. They were both headstrong, independent, and charismatic. The St. Louis dowagers and pundits alike agreed that their marriage would never last. Forty years later when my father died in the home where I grew up, my mother was at his side and still married to him. As a child, I was in awe of them both. But sometimes I secretly wished that they would not stick out as much as they did in our neighborhood.

Before my mother stopped working in my father's office, we had several different nursemaids who looked after us during the day, another oddity for our neighborhood. One of our first housekeepers was a spectacled, hefty woman who wore a starched white apron and sturdy walking shoes in the summer, and she never left the house without her mink-trimmed coat when the weather turned cold. She took another job when I was a toddler, and I only know her from photos. Mrs. Borum, my favorite, replaced her and worked at our home through my teen years. Unfailingly on the lookout, she rarely let me out of her sight until second or third grade, holding my hand when I wanted to go to the candy store three doors away. When she finally got tired of listening to my complaints about being old enough to go there alone, she would plant herself in front of our house and watch me walk there, and wait until I came back. She played gospel music for us on the radio when our parents went out and she babysat us. I am embarrassed to say that my brother and I didn't always appreciate this. Our teasing, however, never put the slightest dent in her love for us and she'd just laugh us off. I also learned what vitiligo was from Mrs. Borum, as she steadily lost her deep brown pigmentation and turned into a woman covered with egg-white patches of skin. She was one of the most sincere people I've ever known.

WHAT A PAIR!



Gail Milissa Grant, 1953.

My parents' social life took place on the north side with other professional families. My father belonged to the Royal Vagabonds, whose annual New Year's Eve party was still "fabulous," the event of the holiday season. My mother shied away from girls' clubs, such as the Links or the Girl Friends. These were national clubs with local chapters and founded largely as social outlets for their members. The meetings were held in their homes (where else?), and each Girl Friend or Link made sure everything (from table service to linens to food and drink) reflected only the best in taste. Mommy was never much of a joiner, unless it involved a tour group headed off to South America or the Caribbean.

The other side of town, which represented a mere four- or five-mile trek, was a world apart to me. While most of my friendships developed closer to home, I played with some of the children of my parents' circle. They all seemed so bold and sure of themselves. They had their own social clubs, like Jack and Jill and Tots and Teens; used slang that I didn't understand; and were fairly content to inhabit a segregated north side where the world was, indeed, their oyster. Next to them, I felt like Ollie B., my mother's country cousin, who visited us once from Tennessee and arrived with his suitcase tied shut with heavy cord. Or were his pants held up with it? Or both? I didn't realize that being the color of a brown paper bag with borderline aquiline features and flyaway, curly hair scored big beauty points in "their" world. If I had, I might have spent less time wishing to be a swan.

My mother bought some of our groceries by going north, and I loved riding with her through streets jammed with activity. She sought out the soul food that our local stores didn't carry. She purchased fresh catfish and crappie from open-air stalls, as well as collard and mustard greens, bulbous turnips on stems that seemed as tall as me, and pigs' feet, snoots, and ham hocks. She also

shopped at downtown's Union Market, where she had gone with her mother as a child. While there, we sometimes went shopping at one of the big department stores and had lunch in its cafeteria. Usually the only Negroes in sight, we were riding just behind the crest of a wave that would soon wash over America. Whites were not yet ready to get wet. Talking ceased when we entered, but the stares never did. A family friend happened by once while we were eating and he summed up what must have been on everyone else's mind in the restaurant. He slid into a seat at our table, leaned back, crossed his legs, surveyed the scene, cocked one eye, and said, "I bet I know what all of these white people are wondering. What in the world is this Caucasian woman doing here with a Mexican child and that Negro man?" I laughed along with my mother, not fully understanding the joke but questioning why he would call me a Mexican when I knew I wasn't.

My mother's Caucasian cast never affected me until I left St. Louis. Outside of my hometown, people didn't know my mother wasn't white and would sometimes assume she was when she visited me. I spoke English properly, was educated, and knew how to deal with most people—nothing terribly outlandish or noteworthy, having been raised squarely in middle-class America. Yet when viewed by some white people, these fundamentals became so outstanding that they must have been the result "of a white parent." I always wanted to introduce her by saying, "and by the way, she's not white." Their satisfied looks bothered me: "Aha, I just knew she had a white parent. No wonder she is so well spoken, so well whatever. So much like us." The truth eventually came out, and I guess it was worth the wait; they were even more puzzled.

My mother may have stopped working for my father in the early 1950s, but she didn't stop helping support our family. She became licensed as a real estate broker, and I remember her throw-

ing us in the back of her four-seater Nash Rambler and speeding off to show properties to her clients. David and I always found something to fight about along the way. “King” of the coveted padded armrest in the back seat was our most frequent battle. It flipped up or down, and whoever controlled it won, which meant knocking each other off it repeatedly.

My mother always had household help, was svelte and immaculately groomed, and read about faraway places with strange-sounding names. My father called her “Red” for her auburn locks and freckles, and my brother nicknamed her “Bubbles” one day and captured the effervescence of her personality. As far back as I can remember, she took us on weekend trips to Chicago to see our great aunts when school was in session and on longer visits in the summers. She drove us cross-country several times to Los Angeles on Route 66’s two-lane highway. Both of these destinations were like the Promised Land to me. It felt as if we could go anywhere—to restaurants and stores and movies and the beaches—without the stress of “unknowing” hovering over me.

We did have a scrape with it once, however, on our way to the West Coast when we were refused service at a diner in Oklahoma City. I remember how my mother walked into the place—as if she owned it—and the way she left it when it was clear that she didn’t—the same way she had come in. She was boiling mad but she just got in the car and went to the next restaurant she could find and entered it the same way. As the hostess pulled three menus from behind her station, my mother told her what had just happened to us. The white woman blushed and said something like, “I’m so sorry. We’re not like that here,” and escorted us to a table. I’m not certain but I think we got our desserts on the house.

Los Angeles had many colorful neighborhoods to explore: Olvera Street where we gorged on enchiladas and tacos, tried on sombreros, and listened to strolling Mexican musicians; Chinatown with its restaurants and curio shops; the Farmers Market—an enormous, covered, outdoor shopping mall that flaunted California’s wealth of produce for the world to see; and numerous black communities with all sorts, sizes, and shades of stucco homes and flats, some with swimming pools. The best excursions were to Knott’s Berry Farm, America’s first theme park, and the newly opened Disneyland.

Chicago was as engaging but in a different way. Its South Side still had almost everything the larger white community had. Full of upscale businesses and theaters, one could live a lifetime within its borders. No weekend trip was complete until we had Sunday brunch at the top of the then-tallest structure downtown—the Prudential Building. No summer was satisfying until we rode every ride at the integrated Riverview Amusement Park. I don’t remember ever attending the park’s famous “Midnight Ramble,” when the grounds were taken over by Chicago’s colored kids, but I felt as if I had. It was the high point of my friends’ summer and they described it in such detail that I got a rush just listening to them. It ran from 8:00 p.m. until midnight with no parents in sight!

St. Louis had its own Riverview, also known as Chain of Rocks Amusement Park, on the far north side of town. I went there at least once but recall feeling nervous. It carried its own “unknowing” baggage, marked as it was by whites’ rioting when the park was integrated around 1950 and by further periodic outbreaks of violence thereafter. The Forest Park Highlands was the city’s largest and best-known amusement park—and segregated. It may have let down the bars to us before it closed in 1967, but given its

reputation I never went on any of its rides. Built on twenty-three acres of land, it stretched for what seemed like a mile along one of the city's major thoroughfares. Riding past it with the windows rolled down, I could hear the children's laughter as they bumped each other in the dodge 'em cars or their screams as they rode the Comet, the park's roller coaster. I always wondered what it would be like to ride on it, a twisting mountain of a ride that looked like it was made of gigantic matchsticks. I did go to the Highlands's swimming pool—just once and just before it closed—without incident. Yet Chicago's Riverview held my affection. I knew it had its share of racial incidents but I never experienced them. A little on the raucous side, to me it was the world's best joyride.

While in Chicago, we usually stayed with one of our great aunts. Each would try to outdo the other by packing a homemade lunch for us to take on the road back home so we wouldn't have to tiptoe around restaurants that might not serve us. They usually mimicked one another's menu and stuck to fried chicken, potato salad, and deviled eggs, with salt and pepper separately wrapped in waxed-paper wedges. Aunt Clara, who had married again and moved back to Chicago, specialized in baking bread and, if she felt like it, would include a warm loaf, tucked inside a linen towel. Aunt Bert had her own recipe for dinner rolls that had to be torn apart from each other; when we did, the butter almost dripped from the edges. So they did do battle in the bread department. Or they may have just slathered butter on slices of bread from the Butternut Bakery, a wholesaler that had a retail entrance. I always imagined that the residents who lived around the bakery might have stormed the place if they couldn't buy its goods—the impossibly delicious smell of its freshly baked bread wafted for blocks in all directions. We usually only stopped by to see Aunt Minnie. She was one of the first-born Franklins and her days of

WHAT A PAIR!

fixing elaborate meals were over, although she would still have a peach or blackberry cobbler waiting for us.

I actually got to know these great aunts much better than any of my grandparents, since they outlived them all by decades. Daddy's father died when he was thirteen, and his mother passed in 1955, just as I turned six years old. I had to rely on my parents' stories about their parents for an understanding of how hard they worked to create their businesses and educate their families. Grandpa and Grandma Hughes had come from Tennessee with only grade school educations; my father's father had finished high school, but Madam Grant hadn't.



Aunt Minnie Franklin Ware, ca. 1930. Courtesy of the Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University, Washington, D.C., Mildred H. Grant Collection.

Before her death, Grandmother Grant and Aunt Vivian occasionally came to our house for dinner. Usually dressed in a black, ankle-length dress, Madam Grant looked at me tenderly but still seemed fairly unapproachable, although my mother claimed she had a great sense of humor. Vivian, with her barely noticeable smile and dark-rimmed, downcast eyes, rarely spoke at table, except to her mother or my father. Many of my parents' friends talked to me about Madam Grant and how respected she was in the community, and how much I physically resembled her. They also spoke of Vivian, underscoring that she wasn't pitiable, just limited. (Vivian died five years after her mother.) After Grandmother Grant's death, my parents took me to one of the houses where she had worked on Lindell Boulevard. I believe it was the Anheuser mansion. Dressed in my Sunday best, I met some of the family. They seemed to know my father well, with first names exchanged all around. My grandmother, however, was still Madam Grant to them and they were delighted to meet her granddaughter. I don't remember what they said about her; among other sights, I was transfixed on the massive chandelier that crowned their private ballroom.

The Hugheses were still having wakes and funerals, albeit few, by the time I remember going to the visit them on Lawton Avenue. The heart of the house remained in the kitchen with its oblong dining table and the miniscule sink whose tap marked "cold" spewed hot water and vice versa. They'd been that way forever, and no one thought to switch them around. Grandma would still handily prepare meals with my mother assisting her. Grandpa was failing. He walked with a cane but would always make his appearance at the wake, lean against the back wall for a respectable period, hobble upstairs, and then descend in time to bid everyone farewell. They had "help" only as needed but always

seemed to have a chauffeur on hand. I doubt that either of them ever drove themselves anywhere. David and I treated as our own, Mother's long-ago favorite plaything—the church truck. One of us would stretch out on its cool stainless-steel top and pretend to be in flight while the other would push.

Our grandparents' mood visibly improved whenever we were around. "Would you like some big man's coffee with breakfast?" my grandmother crooned to my brother and me in the morning. A brew of hot water, warm cream, and sugar, it was how she satisfied our pleas to drink real coffee just like the grown-ups did. She always served it to us in oversized coffee cups on saucers and never in anything that resembled a mug. This tradition would follow us to Arsenal Street, where mugs never lined our kitchen cabinets. I would not learn the touching significance of this practice until decades after Grandma passed away and someone asked me why I didn't have any mugs on my shelves.

Grandpa Hughes died about a month after Grandmother Grant; a year or two later, Grandma Hughes was diagnosed with cancer. In the meantime, I do recall several excursions with her—once when her driver took us to the Union Market to buy groceries. I met all of the vendors she'd known for decades, especially the butcher. He still treated her as a special customer. "I've got a great cut of meat for you, Mrs. Hughes," he said. "I've been holding it aside for you." Another time, she took me shopping at one of the fancy department stores downtown and bought me a midnight blue, felt hoop skirt with pink poodles stitched onto it. Then she got really sick. My father raised more than a little Cain when she was put in the basement of Barnes Hospital. He threatened to run for his Bell & Howell camera and film the exposed pipes and beams over her head, but she was swiftly taken to an aboveground floor.

She and her hospital bed moved into my bedroom as the cancer took over, and both David and I relocated to the third floor until she died. My most lingering memories are of her inescapable screams in the night when her pain became unbearable, and of her lethargy during the daylight hours. Aunt Clara and Aunt Bert helped my mother care for Grandma during the last months of her life. They took turns visiting from Chicago—a week here, a week there. After Grandma passed, these two immediately took over as our grandmothers. They savored the new part they played in our lives. Just as they had nurtured our mother in San Diego and Chicago during her schooling, they now had her children to mind. They did their best to make up for our lacking the mothers and fathers of our parents.

They also became my friends and confidantes for decades. Aunt Clara taught me a lot of practical things. She told me to rotate the bed linens each time I changed them so they would wear evenly. She once scolded me when I almost tossed an eggshell before inserting my pinkie into it and scraping out the last bit of white for the cake we were making together. “You’re wasting half the egg,” she said. She then showed me how to get it all out. Then as I stood there beating the batter clockwise and my arm grew tired, I changed directions and turned it counterclockwise. “Don’t back-beat that cake. You’ll ruin it!” she said. I didn’t even know she was watching me since she was intensely glued to her job of grating fresh coconut for the icing. When we finished, she crushed the eggshells, led me to her garden, and showed me how to scatter them as fertilizer. When Aunt Bert’s second husband died, she used to call me and we’d gossip about her new boyfriend. My aunts were warm and funny and wonderful.

We sometimes drove east during the summer to visit my godparents, the Calloways, who lived in a big white house on almost

WHAT A PAIR!



*Aunt Bertha Franklin Penny, ca. 1925. Courtesy of the Moorland-Spingarn
Research Center, Howard University, Washington, D.C.,
Mildred H. Grant Collection.*

two acres of land in Westchester County, New York. There was another kind of “unknowing” I felt out east—a sort of, “How am I supposed to act amongst all these very sophisticated, good-looking, famous black people?”



Aunt Clara Robinson, date unknown.

One trip, however, distinguished itself from all of the others. In the summer of 1954, my parents and I went to Cuba to visit Uncle Cab and his family while he performed in Havana for a month. My brother didn't come because he was ensconced at his

annual summer retreat—Camp Don Bosco for Boys—and refused to budge. I remember all of the preparations for our drive from St. Louis to Miami, where we would board a ship for Havana. My parents plotted out our itinerary with the help of the famed TripTiks from the Automobile Association of America. Once that was done, they telephoned people they knew who lived along the route, asking if we could overnight with them. They also called their St. Louis network for names of friends or family who would host us. It seemed like an escapade to me; I never realized just how serious, and potentially dangerous, the going and coming parts of our vacation would be. We were driving through the South—a land filled with more “unknowing” than anywhere in America at the time. Each of my parents’ friends concluded their conversation with the same advice: “And remember, if you have to stop for the night where you don’t know anyone, go to the local preacher or undertaker. You’ll usually find them on the other side of the railroad tracks. One of them should be able to tell you where there’s someplace that accepts colored—a roadhouse, or motel, or room to rent in someone’s house.”

I mainly recall the whimsy of the weeping willow trees, the scorching southern sunshine, and the poisonous spider I found inside the chest of drawers at one of the places we stayed on the other side of the tracks. Beauty, heat, and danger—that summed up the South for me as a child until we reached Miami, where we were welcomed royally at the legendary Lord Calvert Hotel. It catered to well-off blacks and was more like a motel with all of the rooms surrounding an inner courtyard and pool. Ella Fitzgerald was one of the guests. We left for Havana late one afternoon just as the sun kissed the horizon and we arrived in its harbor the next morning. Uncle Cab met us and pushed his way past the horde of Cubans on the pier, all chirping “Cab Calloway, Cab



David M. Grant, Gail Milissa Grant, and Mildred Grant en route to Havana, Cuba, at the Lord Calvert Hotel, Miami, Florida, ca. 1953.

Calloway, Cab Calloway.” A sensation in Havana, Uncle Cab was surrounded by crowds wherever he went.

We spent several weeks with him and his family at the bungalow he had rented. My father and I would awake at dawn and wander along the retaining wall that kept the sea at bay in downtown Havana. I recall the primary colors of the clothes that the women wore, the friendliness of all the Cubans we met, and Fulgencio Batista’s soldiers with bazookas slung over their shoulders. Havana had its own brand of beauty, warmth, and danger. We

retraced our steps on the return home, sidestepping the roadhouse with the spiders. We, however, did get stranded one more time on this trip. Our friends' advice could not tell us which gas station to sidestep. When we filled up the tank at one, and my mother tried to use the bathroom, she was "refused service." "What am I supposed to do," she snapped at the attendant as she thrust her cupped hands in his face, "pee here?"

Ordinarily, my father wasn't too much of a traveler, but he enjoyed our Cuban getaway and he liked going back east to visit his friends in Washington and New York. He loved being an attorney and was always itching to get back to court. He was the only dad around our neighborhood who wore a suit and tie to work and who drove there each morning in a late-model car. He usually rose before dawn and descended to the basement where he stoked the furnace with coal, sometimes with our help, until we changed over to oil heat. He then two-finger-tapped out court motions on a typewriter or wrote legal briefs in longhand. I saw him as a funny, affectionate man with a big stomach who sometimes held me captive as he told me about his latest trial in court or quoted legal precedents. His appearance, however, belied a steely character. The stories told time and again gave me a glimpse of the relentless duel he had carried on with St. Louis's power structure over equality for Negroes under the law for nearly two decades before my birth. Fortunately, I also witnessed some of his derring-do, firsthand.

When I was about seven or eight years old, my father was arrested for the last time in his life. I was away at summer camp and I heard about it on the radio. Fortunately, by the time the news reached me, he had already been released and was at home. All I knew was that he had been arrested for something having to do with a license plate.

Earlier that summer my father bought a Cadillac, second-hand, from one of his friends who traded hers in every year or two for the newest model. He'd never owned this make, preferring Chevrolets, but she gave him a good deal, and he decided to splurge a little this time. He was driving home at twilight and had just crossed Chouteau Avenue when the police pulled him over and told him they couldn't read his rear license plate. Cadillacs had electric lights that illuminated the plates but, according to them, the numbers were smudged. Furthermore, they told him to open the trunk because they wanted to search it. He refused since they had no cause and no search warrant. He also declined to take the ticket and became belligerent, just hoping they would arrest him on this trumped-up charge; they did. He then secretly smiled to himself because he knew where they would take him and who would be in charge of the station.

When the police escorted my dad into the precinct and the captain appeared at the desk, he screamed out at the cops: "What have you done? Do you know who this is?" He then went into a tirade about how this would be all over the news and how damaging the publicity would be to the police force, and so on. When he finished, my father only added, "You got that right!" He and the captain could already envision the headline: "David M. Grant, Prominent Negro Attorney and Civil Rights Activist, Arrested for an Obstructed License Plate." And the news hit the papers just about like that, much to the City's embarrassment. At least for a while, Negroes didn't get pulled over for no reason. "And that's the way she goes."

Around the same time as this incident, Daddy created a furor that caused us to take an unplanned, lickety-split vacation. My father was elected in 1956 as one of thirteen members of the Board of Freeholders to write a new city charter. He later talked about

how Jordan Chambers had hand-selected him to run, knowing he could win. Because it was an unpaid position, my father objected at first. “Jordan, I got two kids I got late in life. I’ve got to educate them. I just don’t have that kind of time.” Jordan bit down hard on his cigar and said, “All those reasons are personal, aren’t they?” My dad said yes. “Well, this one’s got to pass your personal consideration; this one you owe the people.” He then stroked my father’s ego but also spoke the truth: “You tell me somebody who knows as much about municipal government as you know, and who’ll speak and take a stand like you will, and I’ll let you off the hook.” With that reasoning and after my father ran it past my mother, he was now 100 percent hooked! He ran fourth in a field of more than forty and immediately became chair of the Committee on Legislation. He worked longer hours than usual because of the charter and his legal practice. He’d come home exhausted, but I also recall how energized he was as a freeholder. He felt that, most probably, he wouldn’t leave us a large inheritance but by having his name on a city charter that could last for decades, he would leave us a more meaningful legacy.

Well, it didn’t quite turn out that way because the powers that be saw to it that the new charter would dilute black voting power and reduce Negro representation on the Board of Aldermen. Daddy refused to sign the charter, and the city fathers fumed. So angry were they, in fact, that we got in a car and skedaddled to Indiana on an abruptly arranged vacation. When we came back, my father and other black politicians organized a grassroots campaign to defeat the charter, and they did—with blacks casting decisive votes. Some credit this victory with awakening the St. Louis black community to its electoral power. Before long, there were two more black aldermen, a black on the school board, and Ted McNeal as the first black in the Missouri Senate.



Left to right: St. Louis School Board member James Hurt, State Senator Theodore D. McNeal, Eighteenth Ward committeeman Fred Weathers, Jordan Chambers, and David Grant, ca. 1960.

Shortly after the freeholder debacle, the Board of Aldermen created a position for my father—as director of legislative research. “Keep your friends close and your enemies closer.” I think of that line when I reflect on his job there. Back in city hall again after fifteen years, my father would have to let someone else try or trumpet certain cases and causes. I think he did it for us. “I

got two kids I got late in life. I've got to educate them," were his words to Mr. Chambers the year before. He needed a paycheck to augment his legal fees so he could provide us with everything we needed and all of the extras—first-rate educations (including graduate school) and European study abroad for both David and me. He did a great job at the board, lauded by aldermen for the innovations he brought and the way he crafted language to get bills passed, especially anything that would help black St. Louisans. And he loved working there.

One of my favorite stories about Jordan Chambers arose from Daddy's having worked at the board. My father told it, not only to testify to Chambers's political acumen but also to have a good laugh at himself. Board of Alderman president Alfonso J. Cervantes had mayoral aspirations long before he won the position in 1965. He would discuss them with my father and even told him that, if he were elected, he wanted my dad to be his city counselor. When Daddy, in all seriousness and with a degree of pride, told Jordan, he eyed my dad, paused for an instant, and said, "And you believed him?" My father used to roar out Jordan's line and then laugh so hard that a droplet or two would stream down his face.

My father accepted the position because he would be better able to discharge his responsibility to us, but it took its toll on him. As the years passed, times changed. He still believed in the power of the law and was dismayed to watch violence and riots and irrational ranting sweep through black communities. We had come a long way since "there was no place for us to go in St. Louis," but we had a long way to go. For him, the legal road was still the one best traveled.

He continued laboring within the Democratic Party. In 1960 he served with Eleanor Roosevelt on the National Democratic Platform Committee and helped write the civil rights plank

for the Kennedy-Johnson campaign. The following year, he was appointed as a member of the Missouri State Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights. And the year after, President Kennedy selected him as a member of the U.S. delegation to Uganda's Uhuru gala when it celebrated its independence from Great Britain. President Johnson also appointed him to his Committee on Government Employment Policy and invited my parents to dinner at the White House.

In spite of these distinctions, I still felt a growing wistfulness within him as he watched my brother throw himself into creative writing and saw my love for art history grow. The realization that he would be unable to pass on his legal expertise and political know-how to one of his children left him wanting. He gave selflessly of his time and diminishing energy to all those who asked for it. Young lawyers, now older and established, who had sought him out still talk about how much they learned from him, how much his very stature and those of his colleagues inspired them to carry on and become the best at their profession. And he still fought battles for respect as a black man, no matter how small. I once accompanied him to the bank we used on Grand Avenue in the late 1970s. When a twenty-something clerk addressed my father as Dave, Daddy roared, "I am old enough to be your grandfather. Don't you EVER call me by my first name again, you hear?"

He may not have fully understood that my brother and I both carried out his legacy in our own ways, not through the law but as public servants. I became a cultural attaché in the U.S. Foreign Service and served my country on four continents as one of a small cadre of black women. My brother ultimately became involved in international conflict resolution, using the methodology of nonviolent action, just as our father had. Throughout our

lives, we tried our best to stand up for what we believed in, as did my father, with my mother supporting him in the background.

One story that never got passed around and that bears this out was one only I knew. I had one chance to tell a tale on him to a roomful of his cronies, but didn't. In 1976, a group of St. Louisans formed a committee to celebrate my father's fifty years of service to the community. My mother had initiated it with a call to Ted McNeal, who immediately agreed to handle it. The speakers told story after story of Daddy's courage, intelligence, and honesty and applauded others with whom he had collaborated. One speaker even revealed my father as a "swinger," adding that, "as he matured, his battling became constructive combat."¹ One of the aldermen related how central my dad had been in getting a public accommodations bill passed for the city, which I didn't know. He made sure it was NOT called a civil rights bill since some aldermen would "inwardly flinch at the term" but "they might ask what was meant by a Public Accommodations Bill. The answer of course, was that it was meant to make public places accommodate the public. To this the questioner might respond, 'Don't they do that now?' thus opening the floodgates for exposing all of the mean and petty discriminations of Jim Crow." Daddy wisely added every nationality and nation he could think of "to insure [*sic*] that such person if he be English, Irish, French, Italian, Spanish, German, Hungarian, Austrian, Slav, Czech, Greek, Lithuanian, Armenian, Russian, Norwegian, Swedish, Polish, Syrian, African, Indian, Chinese, Japanese, Filipino, Etc., not be discriminated against in places of public accommodations."²

¹ "A Testimonial Honouring David Marshall Grant for His Fifty Years of Distinguished Service as Attorney-at-Law, Public Official and Citizen" (program, St. Louis, September 7, 1975).

² Ibid.



David M. Grant's testimonial. Left to right: Grant; publisher of the St. Louis American newspaper, Nathaniel Sweets; State Senator John Bass; Congressman James Symington; and Bruce Watkins.

My father threw an imaginary bouquet toward my mother during his response to the well-wishers. He called it a “public acknowledgement and appreciation . . . for her basic understanding and constant support over the years, some of which have been difficult and trying.”³ It was a fine night for him . . . and for her.

³ Ibid.

I just wish I'd had the presence of mind to put myself on the program and give my parents a story about themselves. I know my father could have used it and embellished it better than I could. I didn't do it that evening, but now I can.

By the fall of 1968, college students throughout the United States were outraged by the Vietnam War; university investments in South Africa; and recruitment on college campuses by the CIA and by firms such as Dow Chemical. In addition, black student grievances centered on a lack of course materials recognizing blacks' contributions to U.S. history and society, low minority student enrollment, miniscule financial aid, and campus police harassment. I was a sophomore at Washington University in St. Louis, and we blacks had formed a student union and presented our demands to the university administration, who largely ignored what we wanted. In December 1968, a campus cop roughed up a black law student without cause and, frustrated over the authorities' indifference, we took over the university's administrative office. Or should I say, almost every black student on campus that day did. I was home with the flu and as I watched the news, my temperature went down, my head cleared up, and by the next day, I was sitting in with them. As soon as I arrived, my friends wanted to know if my father would represent us. Daddy said he would come and speak to us.

By the time he showed up, one of the university deans had already asked him to persuade us to leave the premises, promising that the school would begin a dialogue with us. We were costing the university \$100,000 per day, and the administration wanted us off of the property. No one believed the administration would keep its word. Daddy accepted our position and agreed to represent us. Then my father said, "All right, now, Gail. You're coming home with me." I just stood there. I didn't say anything. From

my silence and the look in my eyes, he knew I wouldn't be going with him. And from the way he gazed at me, I knew he wouldn't, he couldn't, say anything else to me. He turned and left, and I noticed an ever-so-slight droop in his shoulders. He'd lost this one with me. His wanting me home, safe and sound, sprang from his love for me as a father, but he knew he couldn't undermine so much of what he had taught us by forcing me to come with him. "Get a cause!" "Don't back down!" My mother didn't want me there either; they were both worried that violence might erupt, as it had on other campuses. Yet she brought bags of groceries to all of us without exchanging many words with me.

After ten days of occupying the quarters, we straightened up the offices to near perfection and left. There was an official hearing, chaired by a law professor from Harvard. My father represented us without taking a fee, and the university engaged a high-priced, downtown law firm. I had seen campus cops bullying black students since I enrolled, so my father put me in the witness box. He asked me my name and where I lived. "You live there with me, do you?" he asked me in all seriousness. I covered my face with my hand, blushed, and said, "Yes, I do." The room roared with laughter and Daddy chuckled. I had learned a bit about grandstanding from him—how to manipulate an audience or at least how to get its attention. The hearing went well, and it was clear that the university needed to further investigate its police force and to listen to its students.

Thereafter, the university made a real effort to address our ten "demands," one after the other. The journalists were everywhere trying to interview Daddy during the proceedings, and I could feel he was thrilled to be back in the fray, giving counsel to civil rights activists two generations removed from him.