

Chapter 3



THE COLOR OF LOVE

Acts 10: 34

Then Peter began to speak: “I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear Him and do what is right.”

New Beginnings

The street car that carried three year old Mary and her adoptive mother Ella to work everyday passed homes with lights agleam, and whose dark silhouettes spoke of manicured perfection. As the street car windows framed one stately home after another, Mary's little face was pasted against the glass soaking in their awesome beauty. This picturesque landscape seemed worlds apart from the stop where her journey began each day. Although this prestigious setting was but a few blocks from Mary's neighborhood, the lifestyles of its occupants were worlds apart from her own. Strange that all the residents were human beings residing in God's vast universe, living in the same city, yet treated unequally because of structure and regulations brought about by segregation. Mary Josephine Pascall was a little girl feeling the chill of life's coldest moment due to the dark side of human behavior, brought on by the iniquity that lies deep within the heart.

It is said that a dream must precede each deed of greatness before entering as magnificent concepts within the windows of our minds. How then was it possible for a little girl born with skin declared as an unacceptable color to have a song of hope in her heart, or possess faith in the rightness of things to come?

Perhaps it was because our God made Mary so uniquely different that she thanked Him everyday for the privilege of living. He had given her a strong mind for learning, focused eyes to see His vision, sharp ears to hear His calling, and a gentle heart for loving others. These combined qualities offered Mary the potential for not only surviving the restrictions of her environment, but living up to her tremendous abilities.

Possibly, Psalm 31: 7 best exemplifies Mary's faith in the rightness of things to come through the following words:

“I will be glad and rejoice in Your love for You saw my affliction and knew the anguish of my soul. You have not handed me over to the enemy but have set my feet in a spacious place.”

Fun, Games, And Another Tattered Memory

Everyone loved sparkling, happy Mary, who was so filled with joy that she attracted playmates like flies to honey. Her friends would gather to play hide and seek, jump rope or just shoot marbles to pass the time together. When Mary was a little older, her friends were invited to her basement for entertainment. Only one friend at a time was allowed to visit. She fondly remembers making clothes for paper dolls as well as cooking on the old wood burning stove with her friends Fannie Mae and Farrel.

When Mary was alone, she would read whatever printed material was available. Although her family could not afford newspapers, others would pass their copies around to the various members of the community. What a special time for Mary! She recalls spending many hours trying to read the newspapers that were too advanced for her level. Mary's love for reading was a value that was passed along by her adoptive mother, Ella.

Given all these treasured moments, it appeared that Mary's life was just settling down into a happy natural rhythm when a dark cloud appeared over her family. Unfortunately, Mary lost her step father, which brought another period of grief for her loved ones to endure. However, with the enormous inner strength and faith in God that Ella possessed, balance was soon restored to the home.

Since it was common for the members of Mary's community to visit the surrounding local churches, Ella soon met and married a man who lived in the nearby country town called Hartville. This union provided little Mary, then age 6, with a kind and loving step father that she still remembers with fondness.

Her Walk With God Begins

At age 4, Mary was taken to Washington Avenue Baptist Church where she began her walk with God. Although a large pot bellied stove provided heat for those

gathered, most of the sparks that ignited the air came from the old spirituals that were sung. Even today, Mary's heart skips a beat when she describes the joy and exuberance shown as the congregation praised God in song. As the choir that sat on the platform facing the worshipers raised their hands and swayed at the sound of the first note, the entire church, as if on cue, joined them in making a joyful noise unto the Lord. No song could ever compare to Mary's favorite hymn, "What A Friend We Have In Jesus," which brought the house down every time. Even today, it is amusing to stand behind 91 year old Mary sitting in her wheel chair and observe the bounce in her braid when this hymn is sung. She would probably come right out of that wheelchair if a choir presented an old fashioned spiritual rendition of it. She will say today, "Honey, we knew how to sing to God. Nothing can ever come close to the way we sang that song. Oh, how I miss that music."

"What A Friend We Have In Jesus" is symbolic of the friendship Mary developed with her Lord that not only strengthened over time, but proved to be the solid rock on which she has stood all her life. She found her Savior to be an anchor; a peaceful and lasting place for her heart.

Young Mary fell hopelessly in love with music and made a contribution to those spirituals using her beautiful alto voice. Since Ella had a magnificent, voluminous soprano voice, her contribution added great depth to the moving of the Spirit at each service. It was due to her appreciation of music that she hired a piano teacher at a cost of fifty cents per month to give Mary weekly lessons. As a result, Mary became an accomplished pianist and later played for the choir and soloists in the community.

Once the emotionally sung spirituals stirred up the congregation, the old Baptist preacher took it on home. As he preached hell, fire and brimstone to the faithful church goers, Mary remembers several people talking in tongues and shouting. This was that old time religion that was filled to the brim as a display of love for God. History will state that it was during a time of praise to God that the hearts of black slaves on the plantations experienced a sense of freedom and felt their spirits soar like a bird as the Lord provided the wind beneath their wings. Hallelujah! I am free! I am free for a moment!

Holiday Time

Christmas and Easter meant special programs at church where the congregation presented plays and recited speeches about the Lord. Easter was Mary's favorite religious holiday. As she grew in her faith, the thought of how Jesus chose to die for her sins first brought a bitter taste due to the suffering He endured, followed by an overpowering joy to her soul.

She also recalls getting a new outfit in the spring to wear at Easter service, dying and hunting eggs in glorious colors, and playing with all the visiting children that came to her home. Her mother, Ella, always set several extra tables for all the unexpected but welcome guests that would be sure to arrive for a meal and fellowship. Above all, Mary looked forward to the arrival of her brothers and sister who always spent the holidays at Ella's home. It offered the four children an opportunity to make up for lost time as they shared their hopes and dreams with one another.

Christmas was the time in Mary's family when everything was centered on the birth of Jesus as the reason for the season. The celebration revolved totally around the church as a time to sing beautiful carols in honor of our Savior's birth. One could only imagine a Happy Jesus listening and watching the Washington Avenue Baptist Church congregation swaying and clapping to all the old familiar carols. The Bible says to make a joyful noise unto the Lord, and they responded in kind. What a birthday party for our Savior!

At home, a beautiful cedar scented tree decorated with real candles on each bough was placed as the centerpiece of the room. Because of the threat of fire, Christmas morning was the one and only big moment when the candles would be lighted. Mary recalls vividly how the glow from the candles would flicker over the faces of her family, filling each grateful heart with joy and peace. Mary's little heart would beat faster when it came time to receive her gift. She knew she would be eating fruit and nuts, for sure. If another present was under the tree with her name on it, the contents would be a necessity such as shoes or clothing. Mary would always cross her fingers in hopes that the wrapping paper would not contain that AWFUL long underwear! How she hated to wear that long, scratchy covering on her body.

Church was so important in Mary's life that it became a place where her face could always be seen. Every Sunday, she looked forward to seeing her brothers, Orville and Charles because she knew the afternoon would be spent walking together. Their special time of fellowship was filled with jolly conversation and laughter as they walked to the airport and back. Mary will laughingly tell you that her brothers sometimes taught her mischievous behavior that occasionally got her into a heap of trouble with her mother.

When Mary remembers how she was taught to view the worth of money, it, too, was connected directly to the church. Each week as she was given one dime, she was instructed by Ella that the first half of it was to be placed into the collection plate at Sunday School before claiming the remainder for herself. As a result, of this teaching, Mary recognized the importance of earning money but never let it control her life.

At the Washington Avenue Baptist Church, a group called the Missionary Society played an active role in teaching others, including Mary, how to care for the younger children. Mary participated in this group most of her life and supported it later by becoming president.

Segregation Restrictions

Since segregation limited people of color on the selection of places to frequent for entertainment, both the church and the school became the centers of activity for fellowship. One vivid example of the restrictions Mary and her community faced was choices of movie theaters. Landers Theater was the only one people of color were allowed to attend. Upon arrival, they were to purchase a ticket, enter through a side door, and climb all the way to the third balcony, out of sight to the white folks below. Therefore, members of Mary's community were closely acquainted and offered love and support to each other on a daily basis. It was such a unified group that every member accepted the responsibility of caring for the young and old alike.

School Bells And Skin Color

Mary attended Old Lincoln School which was totally segregated, from grade one through six. She was a very bright student and looked forward to each day with sunshine and happiness. In addition, the fact that her brothers, Orville, Charles, and sister Elizabeth were also students there made Mary enormously happy.

Although Mary had found a loving home with Ella Thompkins as her adoptive mother, her sister and two brothers were not quite as fortunate. Consequently, Mary knew that her siblings were sent to school on most days without an adequate lunch. Everyday, Mary worried so much about her brothers and sister that she watched carefully as her mother packed her own bag, making certain enough food was included for all four of them. She would patiently assist her mother in loading enough cookies, meatloaf sandwiches, and milk to give all four of them full bellies. Under no circumstance would she be well fed at noon if her brothers and sister were to go hungry. She would stomp her foot and say, "If they go hungry, I go hungry." Therefore, little Mary could be seen walking down the street to school weighted down with an enormous lunch bag.

One day when Mary went to school, the atmosphere was buzzing with excitement because the students had learned that a new Lincoln School would be built and ready by the time she was due to enter seventh grade. As promised, Mary approached her seventh year walking toward the school with star struck eyes, possessing an excitement that had her heart pounding. She described the larger rooms filled with new furniture like being in heaven. The home economics room was sparkling with beautiful kitchen appliances and ready for instruction on cooking, which all girls were required to attend for a time of four years. Right next door, another room housed all the equipment necessary to meet the needs for instructing the young ladies in four years of sewing classes, as well. In spite of these two beautiful new rooms, and outstanding grades, Mary still loved English more than any subject.

Competitive Sports at Lincoln School required heavy travel for the athletes due to the restrictions of segregation. The teams were only allowed to compete with other schools of color which meant traveling several miles to Lincoln Schools in surrounding towns. Basketball was played at Lincoln School, while football games were held at the Drury College Stadium.

When Mary described her school attire, she broke into gurgling laughter, remembering her own struggles in this department. The style was for girls to wear their hair in braids with clothes pins fastened to each like berets. Of course wearing pants was not even a question, which meant that girls wore dresses or skirts, long cotton stockings, bloomers and shoes or boots that tied. Due to Ella's fear that Mary might be in danger of contracting tuberculosis, she was made to wear long handled underwear beneath her clothes. Mary loudly exclaimed, "You

heard me right! I was the only girl whose mother enforced the long underwear rule! I stood out like a sore thumb, was teased, and terribly embarrassed. Oh, how I hated that long, scratchy underwear that had the horrible button opening in the seat. That old underwear would come down all the way to my shoes. Stuffing the legs in my shoes under my socks to hide them, was a tedious, daily ritual from winter until spring.”

Mary continued on with passion by firmly stating, “One day, I reached my limit and slipped down to the basement level of the school when no one was watching. Working like lightning, I rolled those old scratchy legs up as high as possible so they would not show. Unfortunately, a while later, my mother entered the school unexpectedly and caught me dead to rights, without any possible excuses to dodge trouble. Having been caught red handed by my strong willed mother, I expected the wrath to descend like a bad odor. Instead, I received the shock of my life when I heard the words that came out of her mouth.”

Ella's strong voice sounded electric and disgusted as she loudly stated, “If this is what you are going to do, I just won't buy you anymore long handled underwear. It is just a waste of hard earned money!”

Mary laughed out loud and said, “Even the Washington Avenue Baptist Church choir in all its glory could have never sung a hymn that was more precious to my ears. Free! I was free at last from that terrible, ugly, scratchy, awful long handled underwear! Praise the Lord!”

Prom Dates

The arrival of spring brought the usual junior and senior proms to Lincoln School, causing a flurry of activity for all the students. This meant a time of decorating and fussing over just the right outfit. Mary recalls her junior prom dress as being given to Ella by one of her employers. It was made of blue chiffon, had a short skirt, and felt like a cloud when she tried it on. However, the long gown her mother purchased in honor of the senior prom was her favorite. Although Mary felt beautiful and vibrant in it, her date arrived without any means of transportation, which meant that Mary was required to plod awkwardly along the sidewalk to and from the prom. She remarked that it was not a pretty sight to watch, but lived to tell about it.

When hearing this paragraph read aloud, Mary laughed and stated, “And that's not the end of the story. My old prom date, now age 89, called me yesterday and told me he had always loved me and had regretted not kissing me goodnight. Now that's carrying a torch, honey!”

Mary's Beaus

Mary has been described as a tall, thin, beautiful young lady that certainly did not escape the eyes of the young boys in her community. She was never at a loss for dates. However, Ella did not allow her to keep mixed company unless at home under her watchful eye. When recalling the young man that was secretly her heart throb, she shook her head in disbelief at herself and remarked, “I had one boy that I like real well, but was too full of the devil to let him know. He eventually moved to Texas. Too late, because he is dead, now!”

Tattered Memory

Although Lincoln School was segregated, it was sometimes necessary to travel to Central High School for literature and library work. Although the practice of this kind of trip was restricted at first, Mary was among a group that was allowed to take part in the program. It was on one of these trips that racial prejudice reared its ugly head. Mary was deeply saddened by hurtful remarks and gestures displayed toward her by others at the school. When recounting these uncomfortable moments, pain suddenly swept over her face like a dark wave on the ocean, totally void of light. As her eyes moistened, she sat quietly for a bit and then said, “It was as if they thought the color of my skin would rub off on their own.” When asked what she wanted to be when she grew up, Mary quietly replied, “I wanted so much to be a doctor. In preparation, I completed all the necessary classes in chemistry and biology. However, a lack of finances prevented me from starting on that journey.”

We Shall Overcome

In 1935, Mary Josephine Pascall graduated from Lincoln High School as valedictorian of her class. Standing proudly in her cap and gown, she received the highest honor the school could bestow upon a student for such outstanding achievement. How proud her mother must have felt as she watched her daughter

walk across the platform to receive her diploma. Is there any greater thrill for a parent than to hear the voice of her child delivering the commencement speech as a reward for a life well lived? In spite of all the hardships, grief, and road blocks that entered the life of Mary Josephine Pascall, her faith in the rightness of things to come resulted in the ultimate success for a little girl orphaned and alone at age three.

Once again, Ella's belief that all men are created equal and are to be respected, brought Mary's life a new perspective. In fact, her mother felt so strongly about this point that no racial remarks were allowed in her home at anytime. Mary knew that the consequence would be a sound spanking if the rule was ever broken. Everyone, no matter the color of skin or race, was welcome in the Ella Thompkins home.

This wise adoptive mother had recognized early on that small seeds of hate fertilized by ignorance, racial prejudice, rudeness, and an absence of God's love would grow into a horrendous monster that would set up such a path of destruction that it would decay the very fiber of the human race.

Consequently, over the years, Mary experienced a stream of friends of every race and color knocking at the door of her home. One and all were invited to eat at the table with Mary and her family. It was at this crossroad in life that Mary was taught to be of service to her fellowman. Ella's tender heart held a special place for young children, a love that was transferred directly into Mary's entire being.

Food and laughter were always plentiful for family, friends and strangers alike. She dearly treasured the adult visitors spoiling her, and remembers how wonderful it was to have their children to be her playmates at these gatherings. Mary recalls life to be different when she was a girl because people cared for each other and had plenty to share. God's table, that welcomed all His children, was always full to overflowing with His blessings. Therefore, it was this example of respect for others along with an open door policy that provided Mary with the pattern she would faithfully follow all her life. Charity was ingrained into a young life that would serve as a model of behavior for years to come. Mary's learned behavior would provide a gift to be passed on to the future generations of God's people.

Today, when Mary expresses her opinions on race, she will first recall the history of the United States as it relates to all people. She will state that the American Indian was native to this country and all the rest of us are transients. She will add that some of us migrated here, while others of us were brought in as slaves. Finally, in a show of great humor, Mary will say, “I’m an IBW, meaning Indian, Black and White. My adoptive mother was a BI, (both Black and Indian), and had skin as black as tar.”

In her dramatic alto voice, she continued, “We have different countries and different colors of skin. Honey, when you start rotting, you rot the same way. You turn to ashes. The Bible states “Dust thou art and to dust thou shalt return.” All I want is for my spirit to be happy.”

In summary, the measure of a life well lived is not determined in Mary's mind by the color of hair or skin, but by the depth and endless flow of love for all God's precious children; a lesson Mary internalized and practices even today at age 91.

PICTURES FOR CHAPTER 3



Ella washed and Ironed for families along this picturesque street.
(Courtesy of The History Museum for Springfield-Greene County.)



Washington Avenue Baptist that Mary attended is now a historical building located near the Campus of Drury College.



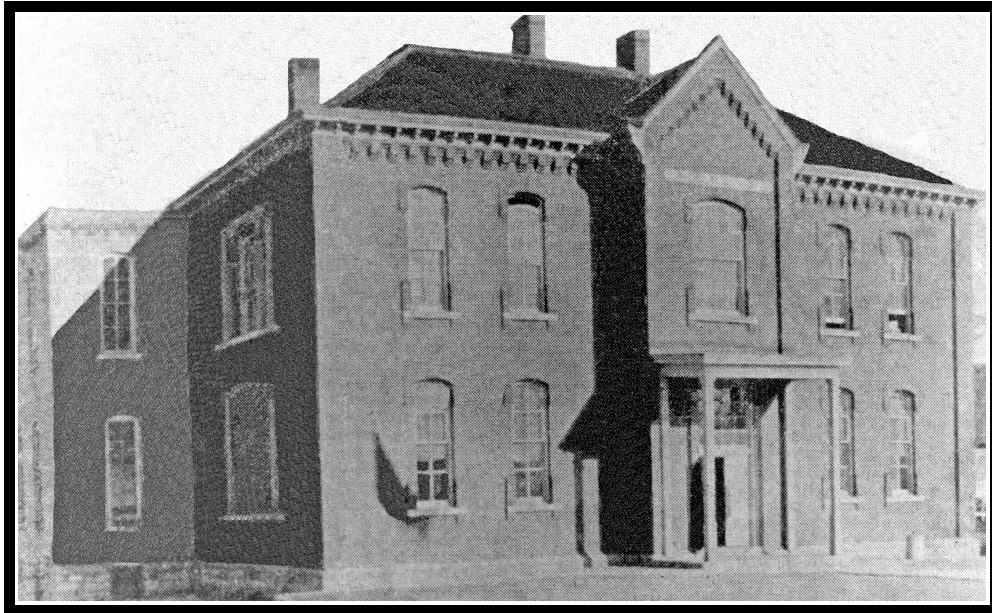
Historic Landers Theater where people of color could attend movies as seen in 2009.



**Christmas tree as it would have appeared at Mary's home during childhood.
(Courtesy of The History Museum for Springfield-Greene County)**



**Sunday school class in front of Washington Avenue Baptist Church old location.
(Courtesy of The History Museum for Springfield Greene-County)**



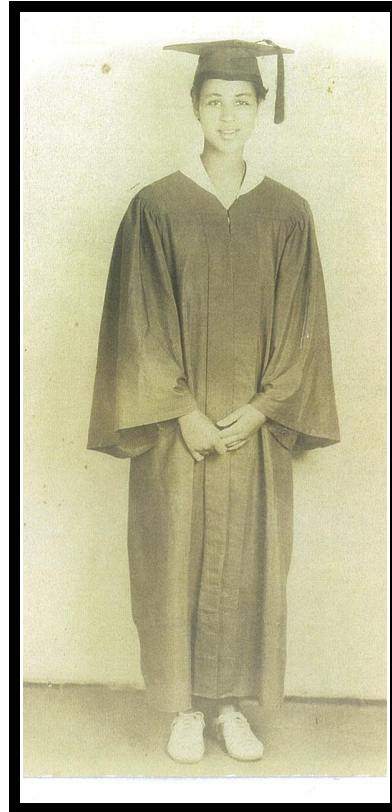
**Old Lincoln School (Segregated) where Mary attended grades 1-6.
(Courtesy of The History Museum for Springfield-Greene County)**



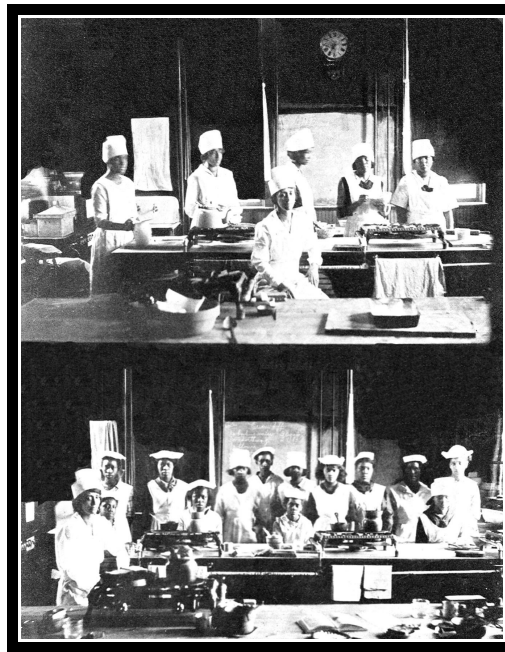
New Lincoln School now located on Ozarks Technical College Campus



Mary at age 10.
(Courtesy of Treshna Stephens)



Mary Josephine Pascall, Valedictorian 1935
(Courtesy of Homer Boyd)



Cooking and sewing classes as seen in New Lincoln School (Segregated)
(Courtesy of The History Museum for Springfield-Greene County)