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Just say the words “The Village” to African Americans born and raised in Columbus ... and they know exactly what you’re talking about. Not German Village ... not Merion Village ... definitely not Muirfield Village. “The Village” is Poindexter Village on the city’s near east side.

The Village. Even folks who never lived there feel a connection. Chances are those individuals have grandparents, aunties, co-workers, lodge brothers who did live there. So, they’ve heard the stories ... glamorized a bit over time. But true, none the less.

I’m not going to give you a history lesson or a civics lesson or a lesson in urban renewal. That’s an assignment for others. I’m here to tell you about “Life in Poindexter Village”, the same lesson so many others who had the privilege to live there were also taught.

I’ve been on this planet for more than six decades. And I can honestly say that the happiest times of my life were the years I spent in Poindexter Village ... years one-through-seven. My mother and her sister, my Aunt Jean, grew up in The Village. They went to Pilgrim Elementary School, Champion Junior High School and East High School. When my mother got married, she and my father lived in an apartment nearby on Garfield. But I spent most of that time at my grandmother’s on Clifton Avenue in The Village. When my father joined the U. S. Army, Mom, my sisters and I moved in with my grandmother, my great-aunt, and my aunt. Three generations living in that townhouse ... seven of us. And yet, the place never felt crowded ... just full.

Our row of apartments faced an open space, a courtyard, fronted by another row of apartments. Every unit seemed to be overflowing with kids. Snooky Calhoun and his family lived across the courtyard. Charlene Morgan, Sybil McNabb and the rest of their family lived near the end of the row. And the Burgesses lived right next door. We travelled in packs. We would all go to the corner store to buy penny candy. We’d save our nickels for the little carnival that would pop up in the courtyard behind us. We’d walk over to the Borden plant in hopes of getting free ice cream bars from the drivers. There was always somebody to play with, to walk to school with, to learn from and to be protected by.

I lived in a house with four adults. But I lived in a village with about a dozen “mamas”. All the grown-ups in our courtyard were responsible for all the kids in the courtyard. It was an unwritten rule. If you saw a child crying, you went to that child, wiped her tears, asked her what was wrong, and took her home to her family. If you saw a child acting up, you had unwritten permission to chastise that child, grab him by his arm and take him home to his family ... where he was punished, not for the original crime, but for bringing shame on the family because Ms. Clegg had to bring him home. So, we learned early on to respect our elders. We “ma’am-ed” and “sir-ed” every one of them. They set the example of being responsible for and caring about others.

The grown-ups also taught us about working, making a living. To me, it seemed that every adult on Clifton Avenue had a job. They all worked somewhere, doing something. You could see them all walking to the bus stop, or walking to the job, or grabbing a ride with someone lucky enough to have a car. From a very early age, I knew that, when I grew up, I was expected to work, to get a job. That’s what everybody in The Village did. They worked.

When they weren’t working, they were worshipping. Union Grove Baptist Church was right there on the corner, easy walking distance. So, that’s where we went ... every Sunday. I think just about everybody in The Village went to Union Grove.

And when they weren’t working or worshipping, they were shopping at Spicer’s, watching movies at the Cameo, buying burgers at Sandy’s, socializing at The Macon.

One of the best things about Poindexter Village ... location, location, location. The Village wasn’t that far from downtown. So, people who worked downtown didn’t have far to go. But the BEST best thing about the location ... the proximity to Mt. Vernon Avenue and Long Street ... the center of Black Columbus. Segregation was still alive and pretty much the norm back then. So, we couldn’t comfortably go just anywhere. Fortunately, everything we wanted or needed was on either Mt. Vernon or Long ... markets, clothing stores, restaurants, nightclubs, doctors’ offices, lawyers’ offices, theaters, funeral homes ... it was all right there, walking distance from The Village.

The Village was more than just home for most of us. It was our first classroom. The Villagers taught us the importance of neighborhood and looking after and looking out for each other. The Villagers taught us the importance of education. They wanted the young Villagers to have better opportunities than they did ... so school was definitely a priority. The Villagers prepared us for living in a white world, knowing that we wouldn’t always have the protection of our Clifton Avenue family. And The Villagers taught us cultural pride. We would get excited whenever we saw someone black on television, packing whichever townhouse had a TV to see Nat King Cole on a variety show. We would swell with pride when a Village kid graduated from high school. We were committed to spending our money where we lived ... with our own. And we knew that our home was named for a great man and that we shouldn’t do anything to tarnish that name.

I was happiest when I lived in Poindexter Village. I felt safe, loved, protected, respected, connected, joyful, smart, prepared, and hopeful. That's what The Village gave me and so many others like me. It was more than a federally subsidized housing complex. It was a playground, a classroom, a church, a training center, a cultural haven, a big warm hug. It laid the foundation for the next ten, twenty, 60 years of our lives. Those memories are just about all we have left now. Some part of Poindexter should be preserved and officially designated ... not just because it was the site of the country's first public housing complex. But because it was home to so many Columbus men and women who worked hard every day to help make this city what it is today. They cleaned houses in Bexley ... ran produce stands at the East Market. They were doormen at the Deshler Hotel ... shoe shine boys at the train station ... teachers in their neighborhood schools.

When the village fell to the wrecking ball, I felt the impact down in my soul. For years, I couldn't even drive by the area. I had the CEO of CMHA save three bricks from the townhouses ... one for each of my sisters and one for me. My brick is placed on the hearth of my living room fireplace. So, I see it every day. And looking at it takes me home ... home to The Village. All of Columbus should be able to do that.

Respectfully and with much Poindexter Pride,

Angela L. Pace