



## The Way It Was



**Benjamin Banneker School served as Bloomington's "colored school."** Photo by Sevil Mafoosi

It is impossible to ever really know what it's like to walk in another person's shoes. But that doesn't mean we shouldn't try. Because only by trying can we even begin to understand what others have gone through and how certain experiences may have shaped their lives. Oftentimes, as well, we can find events in our own histories that can give us a sense of what others might have felt.

What was it like growing up black in Bloomington? For our cover story, that's what we asked the five participants, ages 18 to 83. I found it interesting that in the recollections of the older people there is a dichotomy between the injustices they endured and nostalgia for the close-knit African American community of their youth. Something has been gained and something has been lost—though neither entirely.

Being Jewish, I can relate to certain of their experiences. And I imagine that a member of any minority in this country—Hispanic, Asian, Muslim, Native American, GLBT—can also.

A rabbi once told me that the greatest dangers facing the Jewish people in the United States are the decline of anti-Semitism and increased assimilation. In other words, the more we are accepted, the less likely we are to maintain our

distinct communities—physically, religiously, emotionally. Is that good or bad? I guess it depends on your outlook. I know I would not want to go back to the days when signs at the beach in my home city read, "No Dogs or Jews Allowed."

Bloomington has come a long way since the days of the "colored school," segregated swimming pools, restaurants, and movie theaters, and inherent prejudice—but they are not forgotten. Nor is the warm, strong, nurturing black community that once was.

### Writers Wanted

*Bloom* could use a couple of first-rate freelance writers. If you are a journalist with experience writing for consumer magazines or daily newspapers, send me an email containing a brief bio and samples of your published work.

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