

GROWING UP

Black



FIVE GENERATIONS, FIVE PERSONAL STORIES

as told to ELISABETH ANDREWS

photography by SHANNON ZAHNLE

The history of African Americans in Bloomington is as old as the city itself. In 1818, the year the city was established, African American residents William Cooley and Aaron Wallace bought parcels of land together, only the second land purchase on record. Bloomington went on to become a stop on the Underground Railroad and later served as the birthplace of the nation's first college fraternity for African Americans, Kappa Alpha Psi.

In the meantime and since then, a great many African American families have lived, worked, and thrived in our

small city. Their lives and contributions are inextricably intertwined with the arc of Bloomington history, from the growth of limestone mills and Indiana University to the once-widespread reach of businesses like Showers Brothers Furniture Company and RCA. Bloomington's signature African American churches, Bethel AME and Second Baptist, still stand as enduring testaments to the strength of this community.

In recognition of Black History Month, we wanted to share some small portion of this rich and proud history. Rather than

focusing on the institutions, we chose to gather personal recollections from a variety of people who grew up here.

Beverly Calender-Anderson, of the city's Community and Family Resources Department, helped us contact five people whose ages and accomplishments span a range of eras and experiences. These individual stories aren't meant to represent an entire population but rather offer a handful of personal accounts that are as unique as the people who lived them.

—the editor



Betty in high school

Benjamin Banneker School

Young Donald

Betty with sorority sisters

Marcia on her wedding day

The Chandler Trio

Donald with sisters

Young Shai with Jimmy Ross



Marvin Chandler in his Indianapolis home. He has played the piano since he was four years old.

Marvin CHANDLER, 83



Born in Bloomington in 1929, Marvin Chandler was a piano prodigy who began performing at the age of four. In addition to music, he pursued the ministry, serving briefly as pastor of Bloomington's Second Baptist Church before leaving Bloomington for New York state. He became involved with critical community organizing efforts during the 1960s and '70s, including reconciliation discussions at Attica prison. Reverend Chandler now resides in Indianapolis with his wife, Portia, who is also from Bloomington.

The first Bloomington Chandlers came to Indiana circa 1839 from North Carolina. My great-uncle, Thomas Chandler, owned property up where it's now Arlington. They used to call that area "Chandlerville"—you can still see it on the old maps.

During my childhood, we rented several houses before purchasing our home on West 11th and North Adams streets. My dad, who was an automobile mechanic, went to work at

six in the morning, six days a week. My mother was a domestic. They were very hard-working, very proud people. There were eight of us children, and our parents made sure they gave us what we needed.

Looking back on it now, I ask, "How on God's good earth did they do it?"

I was born in 1929. At that time, Bloomington was just about 21,000 people, counting all the cats and dogs. The basic structures of the social milieu made life orderly: The family was strong; the church was strong.

The people I grew up with were just innately decent. Every now and then something would happen and you would be reminded of the frailties of the human condition. But overall, life was very family oriented, very community oriented, very religion oriented.

Of course, everything was segregated. We attended the Benjamin Banneker School, which was the "colored school." We weren't allowed to go swimming in the public pool at Third Street Park, but we couldn't see why we would want to. We swam in the quarries.

It was an alternative universe. You didn't think about the injustice.

The black community had a strong sense of dignity and self-respect. We placed a great deal of value in education, although most of our parents didn't attend college. Many of them worked in the homes of professors and, of course, we were the housing for black IU students. Because students couldn't live on campus, they lived with our families. It was an extreme exception to the town-and-gown divide.

Many of the schools in the South at the time did not offer advanced degrees, so there were a large number of graduate students who would come out of the historically black colleges and universities and attend IU for graduate studies. Most of those students didn't have any money. The community supported them as much as possible. I remember we would have these elegant teas with everyone wearing their gloves and hats and they would take up all their nickels and dimes and quarters to give to the students.

The biggest feature of my own childhood was music. When I was four years old, my mother bought a piano at Hancock's Auction Barn for a dollar and a half—which was a princely sum in those days, I guess. I sat down at that piano and just started playing chords.

I was still just four when I gave my first public concert. The next year, I performed at the Indiana State Fair with my twin sister, Marcella, and my younger sister, Marlene, tap dancing and playing piano and singing. We won second but got beat out by a guy who could eat a banana and whistle at the same time.

We kept performing as the Chandler Trio, and in our teens we got a show on WTTV in Bloomington. I believe we were the first African Americans to have a television program in the Midwest, and maybe the country.

Jazz was also coming up surreptitiously around town, because at that time it was not considered an art form. Bloomington was fairly conservative socially, especially on the West Side and in the black community. Everybody knew



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who was playing jazz, but it was not openly accepted.

Hoagy Carmichael was associated with the black community then, and my dad knew him very well. One night, my dad brought me to a restaurant downtown called the Coral Room so Hoagy could meet me and hear me play. Before Hoagy could get there, though, he got sidelined at a party. He was pretty well known for being an imbiber.

After I graduated from Bloomington High School, I went to Rochester for divinity school. My wife, Portia, and I were in some very creative work in New York during the 1960s. That was some of the first organizing efforts in the country in terms of black communities building grassroots approaches to collective empowerment.

When we look back now, we wonder why people didn't complain sooner. But we weren't into protests when I was growing up in Bloomington. We didn't have too many rabble-rousers. We just didn't do such things.

Bloomington High School Class of '47'



Marvin
Chandler



(above) After graduating from Bloomington High School, Chandler attended divinity school in Rochester, New York.

(right) Marvin with his sisters, Marlene (center) and Marcella. They began performing in the Chandler Trio as children and were the first African Americans to have a television show in the Midwest.

Courtesy photos



ELIZABETH
ANN
'Betty'
BRIDGWATERS, 67



The seventh of nine children in a longstanding Bloomington family, Elizabeth Ann "Betty" Bridgwaters was born in 1946. Like her mother, who was Monroe County's first African American elected official (serving on the school board), Bridgwaters has been prominently involved with her community, serving in leadership roles with a large number of organizations. She presently works with the Health Professions and Prelaw Center at Indiana University.



Elizabeth Ann "Betty" Bridgwaters at Indiana University's Franklin Hall, where she worked at the Office of the Bursar for more than 20 years.

My great-grandfather Halson Vashon Eagleson was a barber. He brought his family here in the 1880s. If you look in the Indiana University yearbook, *Arbutus*, during the 1890s and early 1900s, you will see ads for his barbershop. His wife had a spa for massages, manicures, pedicures, and dressing women's hair.

His oldest son was my grandfather, Preston

Emmanuel Eagleson, one of the first black students to receive an undergraduate degree from Indiana University. [He was the first to receive a master's.] There were many African Americans taking classes and earning certificates at the time, but it wasn't common for them to stay and get degrees. Marcellus Neal was the first in 1895, and my grandfather received his first degree in

philosophy in 1896.

Goodness only knows what that was like. My grandfather told my mother stories. He would be in class and professors wouldn't call on him. He sat in the rear of the classroom because other students didn't wish to sit next to him.

He went on to obtain his master's in philosophy and to become a minister as well as a

teacher at the colored schools in Bloomington and Spencer. My grandmother was a cook at St. Margaret's Hall [the girls' dormitory on East Kirkwood]. She wanted to own her own home, so she took in laundry, dressed people's hair, catered parties, and made cakes for special occasions.

Black people had a Christian work ethic—"whatever you put your hand to do, do it with all your might." What seemed insane was that black people would not be seated in a restaurant or at the homeowner's dinner table because they were considered "filthy." But black people would knead their bread and nurse their babies. White folks had black people doing everything.

When my mother was born in 1908, she was the first girl in the family in 30 years, so they gave her female family names: Buena Mae Elizabeth Eagleson. She went to Banneker School through eighth grade, and then to Bloomington High School. She graduated from IU in 1930 but kept on taking classes in philosophy and psychology. She earned another 85 hours of post-graduate credits while she did research with the renowned psychologist Dr. Winthrop Kellogg, but she never applied for an advanced degree.

My father, Albert Louis Bridgwaters, was working for a member of the Showers family in Michigan when he came to Bloomington and met my mother at a little restaurant she ran with my grandmother. After they started a family, he began working here. He always worked two and three jobs—as custodian, caterer, bartender, and shipping/receiving clerk. He was insulted when my mother would try to find work. He'd say, "Elizabeth, you don't think I take good enough care of this family?" She couldn't last on a job more than two or three months, he would complain so much—"Elizabeth, the children and I need you at home."

I'm the seventh of nine children, born in 1946. I was born in the hospital, but they put my mother out in the hall until a private room opened up because white women didn't want a colored woman in the ward. That had changed by the time my youngest sister was born in 1952.

We lived on the 900 block of West 7th Street. Black people lived on every side of Bloomington but there were more on the West Side. I had to call the newspaper a couple decades ago when they described the West Side as the "black neighborhood." I was once told by a white person that black people lived on the West Side to be closer to their churches. I said, "Let me give you

some information about this. A term you might recognize is 'redlining.'" No realtor would show you property, no bank would loan you money to purchase anywhere except where they chose to have you own property.

What I loved most as a child was being with my older brothers. I called them "my boys." I spent all my time as a toddler and preschooler keeping up with them and learning everything I could from them. I didn't go to kindergarten because my mother said I didn't need it; I had been learning what my boys were learning.

I had a happy childhood. I attended St. Charles Borromeo School from the first through the eighth grades and was the only black child in my class except in fourth grade when Norma Abner was in my class. [Her father was working on his master's in education.] Many of my friends were white. I genuinely like people. Your packaging has nothing to do with it. I notice your personality and your heart.

After St. Charles I went to Bloomington High School. The counselor there kept trying to push me to take general math even though I had already had some algebra in eighth grade. The same counselor, when I was a junior, prevented me from taking the advanced biology class. She also told me I couldn't take classes at IU, even though I had three study halls just to fill up my day. Having lunch with friends who were white, I discovered that they were at high school in the morning and taking a course or two at IU in the afternoon. It was one disappointment after another, but I thought, "I just want to graduate and go to IU where I will be dealing with enlightened people and I wouldn't have to deal with this foolishness any longer!"

That's not how it turned out. In America, racism is part of the fabric. It's in the warp and woof. We have had some progress, but there's no demarcation where we can say this is no longer an issue. Times change, but people don't change, much. Who likes change? Only wet babies! They scream for it. The rest of us hate it.

As a member of Girl Scouts from elementary school through high school, I learned various skills and crafts and served on the senior council with girls from Columbus, Shelbyville, Morgantown, etc., and I was an alternate to an international encampment. As a member of the Cosmopolitan Club [National Association of Girls' Clubs affiliated with the National



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Federated Women's Clubs], I served in offices from parliamentarian to president and learned to write minutes and reports, gavel a meeting, and maintain a scrapbook. We learned to set up teas and luncheons and about proper etiquette. We had talent shows and chili suppers and sold various things to raise money to attend our annual state convention. Long-lasting friendships were formed with girls from Michigan City, Fort Wayne, South Bend, Muncie, Indianapolis, and Richmond. These experiences served me well throughout my life.

I worked at Aldens Department Store, Banneker Community Center, First National Bank, and Indiana University. I left IU's president's office in 1984 to accept a job at Digital Equipment Corporation [now Hewlett-Packard Corporation] in Massachusetts. I returned to Bloomington in December 1993 and managed a psychiatrist's office, did the research for the opening exhibit for the Neal-Marshall Black Culture Center, and later worked with the city, IU, and MCCSC [Monroe County Community School Corporation] on the Banneker History Project and its exhibit. Both exhibits were award winners.

I'm presently back at IU, working in the Health Professions and Prelaw Center, where I enjoy watching students transition from adolescence to adulthood. I am a lifetime member of the IU Alumni Association, co-founder of the Neal-Marshall Alumni Club, past president of the Boston Alumni Club, and a member of Sigma Phi Gamma International Sorority. I have served on various boards of directors and committees, including Girl Scouts of Tulip Trace Council, Mental Health Association, Girls' Clubs, United Way of Monroe County, and the City of Bloomington Black History Month Committee.

I mourn the loss of the rich, loving, supportive black community of Bloomington's past—the clubs, lodges, and churches that enriched my earlier days and for which I am very grateful.



Betty, 7, while attending St. Charles Borromeo School. Courtesy photo



Marcia Pickett at Indiana University's Wells House. Her grandmother worked as Herman B Wells' cook for 25 years.

Marcia PICKETT, 54



Marcia Pickett was born in 1958 in Pine Bluff, Arkansas, where her father, a Bloomington native, had moved to attend college. The family returned to Bloomington the following year, enabling Pickett and her siblings to grow up near their grandmother, Matilda Hopkins. Pickett currently works for Indiana University in the Office of the President.

(opposite, left) Marcia and her husband Andre on their wedding day in 1980. They met while attending Bloomington High School North.

(opposite, right; clockwise from front center) Marcia's mother, Lenora; father, James Hopkins; brother, Rodney; sisters, VaTonia and Ladonna; and Marcia in the 1970s.

Courtesy photos

My family was so close when I was growing up. We would have these big parties in my grandmother's basement and just rock it. Good food, music, and lots of friends. People don't do that sort of thing anymore. There's just not a closeness like there used to be. That's sad.

We moved to Bloomington in 1959, when my twin sister and I were one year old. My father was born here but attended college at [the University of Arkansas at] Pine Bluff, where he met my mother. They had a son before we were born and later my younger sister.

At first we moved in with my grandmother, before my parents bought their own house. Her name was Matilda Hopkins, but everyone called her Aunt Tillie.

Oh, we used to love her house. It had a big screened-in front porch and my grandmother kept it immaculate. She was a beautiful woman and she spoiled us to death. She would make us homemade biscuits and homemade syrup and buy us these beautiful frilly dresses and socks to match.

She worked for [former Indiana University president and chancellor] Herman B Wells for 25 years as his cook. We would just love to go help her at his parties. He would have the best parties! So elaborate. Dr. Wells would make us feel warm and welcome, especially my grandmother. We were all his friends, not his employees.

My father was a fireman—one of the first African American firemen in Bloomington. I remember him saying that it wasn't easy at times, but he didn't give details. My mother was from Little Rock, Arkansas, and she didn't like it here. She said it was "too country."

Our parents did a good job sheltering us from the prejudice that existed. At that time, most of the African Americans lived around West 7th Street, and you knew everybody. It felt good. Everyone felt like family.

We attended Second Baptist Church, which was the center of our community. All our friends were from church. We kids were in all the church plays and would always do our Easter speeches. My mother would sit in the front row with her switch, reminding us to say those speeches perfectly! She was always the disciplinarian.

We went to Fairview Elementary School for grade school, then Dyer [now Tri-North] Middle School. Our parents kept us really involved, running track and doing pep club. In the summer, we used to hang out at 9th Street Park, which is now Reverend Ernest D. Butler Park, playing knock hockey on a big table.

There was also the Westside Community Center, which is now called Banneker. I remember a lady there named Mrs. Bowen who was so nice. She taught us how to cook. One of my most favorite things that we made were Big Boy sandwiches, just like the ones at the Big Boy Restaurant that used to be in town. Boy, were they good.

One of the worst things was going every two weeks to get our hair done by Miss Theresa Woolridge. Lord! She was just mean. That woman burnt the hell out of my ears with her straightening comb. We would just dread going

there. She lived in a green house on the corner of West 8th and North Rogers streets, and all day long she'd keep sending us across the street to the store to get her a bottle of pop or two slices of bologna. But when she was done our hair was straight as a bone and we looked good!

When my sister and I got to high school, we were in the first class to attend Bloomington High School North all four years. One of my favorite memories from that time is the debutante ball. I remember working for months on that, going out looking for dresses, trying to get it just perfect. My dress was a long white ball gown, with long white gloves up to the elbows, hair perfect, makeup on, and, boy, did we look good—not to brag or anything. The most memorable moment was having our father escort us into the ball and being introduced to society.

When I graduated from high school, my priority was working and having money. My parents wanted me to attend college, but my thought was, "Get me out of school." While in school I participated in an office class, especially my senior year, and I would go to school in the morning and work at the IU Credit Union in the afternoon. Once I graduated, my first full-time job was working at IU Printing Services.

My husband, Andre, and I met in high school and were married in August 1980. This past August we have been married 32 years, and what a blessing it has been. In March 2011, Andre was the recipient of a double lung transplant. It has been a tough two years with being in and out of the hospital, touch-and-go situations, but by the grace of God, prayer, and support from family and friends, we are survivors.

We have one son, Courtney, who has taken the wrong path in life, but we continue to pray



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every day for him and ourselves. I always wondered if things would have turned out differently if he had some close African American friends or if we'd moved to another community. At first I blamed myself, but we did all we could.

The blessing of it all is that we have a beautiful grandson, Dashe, who is four. His mother, Amy, and I are like best friends, and between Amy, Andre, and the other grandparents that Dashe has, we give him lots of love and care to help in the transition of not having a father around. He is well loved. I have to tell you that I love being a grandmother and hope I can be as good a grandmother as mine was.

My siblings moved away from Bloomington, but I stayed to be near my grandmother. She passed away two years ago. I was with her at the hospital. She was so special to me, to all of us. I felt the love and warmth when I watched her look up and see heaven.

All in all, Bloomington has been a good place to live. Could things be better? Of course they could, but they certainly could be a lot worse. I appreciate the time I've been able to spend with my extended family and my church family. When I look into my grandson's eyes, I see the dreams of my grandmother, my dad, my mother, and my son, and I realize that he is our hope for the future.





Donald Griffin Jr. with his wife, Nicole, and their son, Dexter, 11.

Donald

GRIFFIN JR., 42



Born in Indianapolis in 1970, Donald Griffin Jr. grew up in Bloomington after the age of one. Twenty years later, he became one of the city's youngest-ever real estate agents. He now owns Griffin Realty, a residential and commercial real estate brokerage company specializing in the Bloomington area.

I think Bloomington is the best place in the world to live. I love the different types of people—you go into one place and you feel like you're in Portland, Oregon, in another place it feels like New York, and in another I feel I'm somewhere in the deep South. It's just a unique slice of America.

Although I love living in Bloomington, I did have some challenging experiences growing up here. However, what I've noticed is that everything I've gone through has helped to prepare me for the next step in life. It's really weird how things work out like that.

My parents are from Indianapolis. My father, Reverend Donald Griffin Sr., came down here for school in 1969 as part of the very first Groups Program [for first-generation college students]. I was born in 1970, and we were fortunate to live on campus in Married Student Housing.

When my father graduated, he applied to be a police officer. He was only the second African American policeman in Bloomington, after Charles Brown.

As a very young child, skin color was a nonissue for me. It really wasn't until I was five that I first had an inkling about the significance of race in this country. I had a friend from our apartment complex who had moved out to the country. I was at her birthday party, and the kids decided to play tag, and I was "it." The rule: If I touched them, they would turn black.

I came home upset. "The kids are calling me nigger, and I'm not!" My parents had to explain to me that "Actually, yes, being black makes you different than the other children. But it doesn't make you bad."

Things got worse when I started first grade at one of the local elementary schools. Each day at recess the kids would play "KKK" and chase me around the playground. When the weather was too cold outside, they would hold recess in the classroom, without any teachers present, and the kids would just terrorize me.

The teachers finally realized something was going on, and the rest of the time I was there they would send me to the principal's office during recess for my protection. That was their solution. My teacher tried to say that I had below-average intelligence. She told my parents I was the first Negro she had ever had in class and that she didn't know how to teach me.

Thankfully, the school social worker intervened and had me take some tests, which indicated that my intelligence was actually above average. She told my parents, "Something's wrong. Inappropriate things are happening here. You need to get your child out of this environment."

My parents moved me to University Elementary School in the middle of first grade, which was much more diverse and internationally driven. It was a really neat school. I will always be thankful for that experience.

The only downside of going to a different school was that I didn't develop neighborhood friends. When I was nine, there was an incident at our apartment complex. I was on the basketball court by myself, shooting baskets. This group of white kids approached me and told me to get off the court. I suggested that they could play on the other side, and they said they wanted the whole court. They started to push me off, and then they started to beat me up. By this time it was twelve or fourteen kids. They hit me, spat on me, sat on my neck. It seemed like the beating went on forever. Eventually, someone must have gone to get an adult. In the end, I was in bad shape and had to wear a neck brace.

After that, my father talked to each of the kids individually. I think they actually felt bad once they thought about it. It was kind of a group-think incident.

But if that was the negative part of growing up African American in a small city, the positive part later on was that because there weren't that many of us, my default setting was "popular." I'm talking about the cultural shift that happened in the '80s, when *A Different World* and *The Cosby Show* came along and suddenly it was cool to know me. I got so much attention that it wasn't until I went off to college that I realized what a nerd I had been.

I'm 42 now, and I've been a real estate agent in Bloomington for more than 20 years. I really love this community and I'm proud to call it my home.

I think that a lot of the things I went through pushed me to want to succeed. It has been a challenge to overcome obstacles at every turn, but I wouldn't have the great life that I have now and the wonderful family I have now if things had gone differently.

Part of what growing up here meant for me was realizing that you have to be comfortable with who you are. Not just what color you are—I love being black, but that's not the only thing that defines me. At the end of the day, I'm Donald Griffin Jr., and I wouldn't change anything about my journey.

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(clockwise from top left) Donald, 6, with his mother, Marlene; father, Reverend Donald Griffin Sr.; and sister, Marshella, 3. (l-r) Donald, 14, with his sisters Mariesha, 4, and Marshella, 11. Donald on his way to a Sounds of South concert as a sophomore at Bloomington High School South. Donald kneels next to his father, who was his son's sixth-grade basketball coach.

Courtesy photos

Sha'Darrion "Shai" Warfield-Cross is a senior on the Bloomington High School North basketball team. She has accepted a scholarship to play for the University of Tennessee at Martin in the fall.

SHA'DARRION *Shai*
WARFIELD-CROSS, 18



Born in 1994, Sha'Darrion "Shai" Warfield-Cross is a basketball standout at Bloomington High School North and is headed to the University of Tennessee at Martin next year on an athletic scholarship. Her greatest passion, however, is singing. Her next performance is in her school's production of the musical *Crazy for You*.

When I was little, Bloomington was like this fairytale place. Now I don't think that it's good or bad. It's just different.

I was born in 1994. My parents grew up here and went to Bloomington High School North.

I spent a lot of time with my grandmother, who was very close with Jimmy Ross [the first African American director of the IU Office of Scholarships and Financial Aid]. He was like my grandpa. I would ride around the entire IU campus, sitting on his lap driving in his wheelchair. We'd just go until the battery ran out.

I went to University Elementary School, which was really fun. It was a great school. I still

remember all my teachers. They had a big influence on my life. They were always there for me.

At University, I was a minority, but I didn't feel like it. There was so much diversity all around me. I learned to eat sushi, which is now one of my favorite foods.

I started playing basketball when I was five. I played on coed teams at the SportsPlex [now Twin Lakes Recreation Center]. My grandmother and other family members coached me back then. Basketball has always been a big deal for me.

I've always wanted to be a singer, though. I would sign up to be in musicals and talent

shows. I remember performing on a cruise in the Bahamas when I was seven or eight. I almost passed out, I was so nervous.

Then from the fifth grade through the eighth grade, I moved to Fort Wayne and went to St. Jude Catholic School. That's when it hit me that I was the only black girl there. It was good in some ways—it taught me how to interact with everybody and be professional.

I know people say, "Just be yourself," but it's not that simple. I am myself, but there are different situations.

When I moved back to Bloomington as a freshman, I enrolled at North high school. It

was really great reuniting with old classmates from University School, but it was also time to get serious about going to college.

I didn't want to put the pressure of paying for a college education on my parents. They have already provided for me my entire life. I knew I needed to get a scholarship and felt that basketball was most likely how I could get it. I wanted to feel secure that I had taken care of that.

I also started singing the national anthem at North sports events. My freshman year I sang it in harmony with another girl, and when she graduated I started singing by myself.

Things were going really well with that and everyone seemed to enjoy and compliment my singing. Then after I sang at a home game versus Martinsville my sophomore year, the school got a letter saying that the way I sang the national anthem was nontraditional and disrespected the soldiers who died for our country. The administrators told me to sing it in a "traditional" way.

I guess that kind of went over my head. What counts as "traditional" for the national anthem?

It turned into a huge story. *The Herald-Times* came to my house and then Fox, CNN, and

Yahoo! News called with questions. A news crew even showed up at one of my basketball games in Bedford to interview me. A lot of people contacted me—from *Good Morning America*, Wendy Williams, and others.

I really didn't want that kind of attention. It wasn't like 15 minutes of fame. It was like torture. It was taking over my life. I was getting hate mail. Some people were treating me differently.

One good thing that did come out of it was I found out who my real friends are. Though I never sang the national anthem at North again, I got an opportunity to sing at Bankers Life Fieldhouse in Indianapolis. I also ran track that year and had my best-ever season, which relieved some of the pressure.

It took more than a year before people stopped recognizing me as the "national anthem girl." I kind of immersed myself in other things, especially basketball. Between a better work ethic on my part and my dad's training, I was able to really push myself to be as good as possible. The result was a spot on the junior All-Star team and an MVP award. That's when the scholarship offers started coming.

I'll graduate this year in June. I have accepted a scholarship to play basketball for the



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University of Tennessee at Martin. I chose them because they seemed really genuine. It felt like family. I believe they will support me.

I still want to sing. I would sing all day every day for the rest of my life if I could. It just puts me in a very comfortable place. I also love musicals and plays. I had a part in *Suessical* twice, once for the Bloomington Playwrights Project and once in Fort Wayne, where I got the lead role. I will also have the lead role this spring in *Crazy for You* at North.

At Tennessee I'm planning to double major in musical theater and athletic training. It means a lot to me that the Tennessee basketball coach said he would be at my plays, which lets me know that it's not just about basketball with him.

I think I have a pretty good idea of who I am. When I get to college, I'll be able to express it freely. In Bloomington, it can be like everyone wears a uniform. They know what they should say, but it's not always who they really are. ✨



(left) When she was younger, Shai rode around the IU campus on the lap of her grandmother's friend Jimmy Ross, who was the first African American director of the IU Office of Scholarships and Financial Aid.

(right) Shai started playing basketball when she was five years old. She also has a love for music and has been in a number of musicals, including *Suessical* and *Crazy for You*.

Courtesy photos