

Vicki



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Growing up, my mother always told me I was special. ‘Listen,’ she’d say. ‘Pay attention. Because God is going to guide you.’ And I’ve been through a lot in my lifetime, but through it all that always comes into my thoughts. ‘But, I’m special.’

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I’m Elvira, but my nickname is Vicki. I acquired that nickname in high school... because my maiden name was Hicks and they called me ‘Hickey.’ And I didn’t quite appreciate that, so I’d say ‘Vicki.’

I’m the second generation from slavery. My dad was first, and my granddad was freed. All of my siblings were much older than me. Right now, I’m the last that’s living. And it’s lonely here at the top.

I’m 81 years old, going on 82. I don’t know the time or the hour when my time will be up, but one thing I want to hear from my creator when I go is, “Well done, my good and faithful servant.”

I was the only girl in my family who finished high school. My oldest sister turned out to be an alcoholic. Another sister got pregnant and had to get married. And the other got married early to someone in the army and they traveled.

I often wondered when I was young what I would want to do, or want to be. The only job that

I was able to hold down was domestic work, and I wanted to do something besides cleaning people’s houses. I was living with my sister in Philadelphia, after her husband passed away, and I thought, ‘Here I am going on 21, 22 years old, and I have like 12 dollars in the bank. What’s gonna happen to me?’

I marched with Martin Luther King, down in Washington, DC. And there were Blacks who were praying, you know, for freedom, and for this and for that. I was praying for a job. When I called home from Washington, my mom told me that the man from the supermarket said he wanted me to report there at 8 o’clock the next morning.

I caught a train up to Philadelphia and met the gentleman. He told me that, because of all the marching and Martin Luther King and the talk around the area, that he was going to hire a Black. And it’s up to me whether other Blacks would be hired into the company. And I thought that was mighty, you know, nervy of him. But anyway, I went.

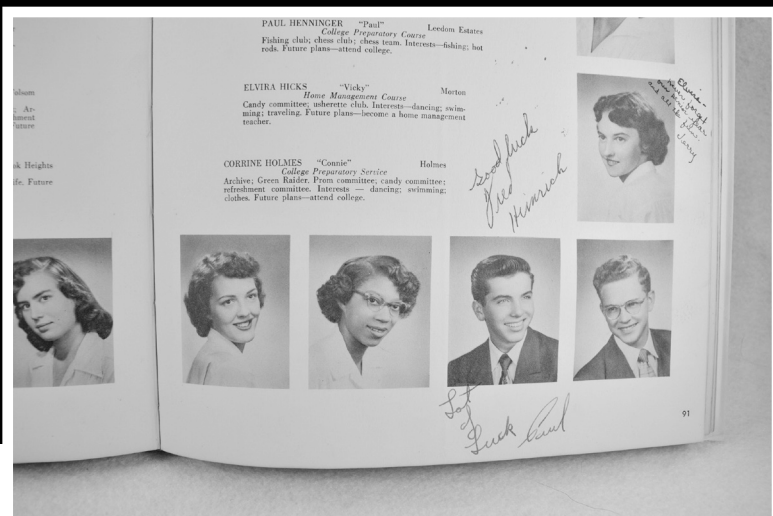
I had a lot of incidents that happened at that job. People would find out there was a Black cashier and throw their food at me. Meanwhile the Lord kept showing



"I got to meet our President Ford, back in '76 and I have a picture from an article written on us in the paper. He has his arm around me and another WAF [Women in the Air Force]. The pilot said, 'Lady, he doesn't do that.' And I wanted to say, 'But I'm special.'"

me, in my prayers and in my dreams, I was wearing a light blue top and a navy blue bottom and a number across my chest. And I told my mom about it and she says I may be going to jail. I'd better be careful handling all that money. I only came to realize my vision months later, at basic training for the United States Air Force – there was my navy blue, my light blue, and my number across my chest. I joined without really realizing there weren't many Black people in the service at that time. But still, it wasn't really a surprise to me. Throughout my life, most of my dealings have been with White people. I can show you my high school yearbook, and you can count the Blacks in it. There was the grocery store, as the cashier. The military. And then at church.

When my husband and I moved to San Bernardino I picked Rialto Community Baptist Church, and when we went there, wouldn't you know, all White people. A lot of the people left, because they didn't



Vicki's yearbook, opened to the page where her own photo is featured, along with a collection of her military accolades and honors

want it integrated. Now the church has grown from 400 to over 3000 members and five locations.

Then five years ago we came down here to this retirement home, and we can name the Black folks here. It's about 12 now. When I got here, it was only six of us.

As the Lord has seen to me, I've always been the minority Black. In everything. And I don't know why he did that, but that must be my lot in life, to be that. It's his reason. And it hasn't always been easy. But each time, I just think that the Lord saw me through the last time, and I know that he is taking care of me. It hasn't always been peaches and cream. But, then again, to the soul it has been.