

Stirring Up Trouble

By John Hope

After the Civil War, many blacks referred to their neighborhoods as Freedom. We lived in Freedom on Hawthorne Street across from Rollins Elementary School. Everyone knew each other and a lot of kids lived there. All the kids had to go to church. Momma and Dad never fought; they always discussed things. Back then, discipline meant something different than it does today. If you got in trouble, the neighbors would punish you and *then* tell your parents, and when you got home you would get “disciplined” again! Wherever you showed out, that is where you would get it. The public embarrassment would keep you from acting up again. In those days, raising children was not just the parents’ responsibility but a community responsibility, because everyone wanted to make sure the children were heading down the proper path.

When I was six we moved to Trexler Avenue. Trexler was the same way—the community raised the kids and the children respected the older folks. We were mischievous little kids, always trying to squeeze our way out of trouble. We spent our days catching frogs and tadpoles, picking berries, and talking about girls. Renard Stowe, Ronnie Wilson, and I would slip out into the woods and go swimming, fishing and play in the streams. Momma would always tell us, “if you go out to the river and get drowned, when you get back here, I’m gonna kill you.” After we came back from fishing, we would tell Momma that someone gave us the fish. But she knew better, and she started going with us.

Well, when I was twelve, I would steal Momma’s sugar and make wine. My second cousins, Stevie and Naimen Anderson, would help. I learned from watching my

Uncle Andrew, who lived in Lowell and knew how to make wine. First thing, we had to go out into the woods off Trexler Avenue and collect berries. We would gather black berries and red plums. Our supplies would be hidden. Next we would mix the berries and plums with water in glass quart jars (ball mason jars used in canning.) To make wine, you needed berries, water and sugar. I would steal the sugar from our house. After mixing, you tie some cloth over the top to let it breathe. Then you had to wait two or three weeks to let it ferment. Sometimes we just couldn't wait and we had to sample it. We kept our wine hidden in the car shed.

Momma figured out that her sugar was missing and her jars too. To get me to open my mouth, she told me that someone had told her I took the sugar. I couldn't lie to Momma. After she found out the truth, Momma sent me out to get a switch. I went out to the bushes to get a hickory switch. I knew that if it wasn't big enough, Momma would send me out again to get a bigger one. And if she had to go get it...look out! I got about a half killin' with the switch. When my sister, May Catherine, found out, she just laughed at me. She never let me forget it either. Luckily, Dad never found out about the wine.