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Monday, July 23, 2007

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Brandy Baker / The Detroit News

The Rev. A. D. Knight Jr. leads prayer in Detroit Sunday as area churches joined a "recovery crusade." 1B

**Detroit's racial divide: 40 years later**

## '67 left its mark on a generation

Metro Detroiters Remember 1967 | Compiled by Detroit News reporters Amy Lee and Darren A. Nichols

Advertisement

In the early morning hours of July 23, 1967, a botched police raid at an after-hours drinking establishment in northwest Detroit triggered an eruption of six days of violence, looting and arson that left 43 dead, injured thousands and caused millions of dollars in damage. Metro Detroiters were affected by that seminal moment in Detroit history. For their stories, turn to 5A.

"I was working at my father's gas station on 10 Mile Road near Kelly Road in Warren when the order to close came in from the police. I remember them stopping gas, alcohol and beer sales. People were on their roofs watching the smoke.

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"Our family had to help our neighbor close and protect their store as the National Guard took up positions on 12th Street. We were all down there in a van and we had to get the stuff out of the store he wanted to save. He had to take everything important out of it. We were trying to save it, (but) they still burned it down.

"I remember seeing firefighters getting rocks thrown at them and the National Guard marching through 12th Street. I was a little scared.

"(The riots) made me more sensitive to the needs of people. I see the conditions and the bigotry that people portrayed and it made me a better person. I do volunteer work. If I see somebody in need, I try to give it to somebody. As far as race relations, I think they have changed. Our children are a little more open and there's not as much hatred as there used to be."

"The 1967 riots in Detroit changed my life. The Sunday they started, I was at a party in Birmingham. When I saw TV coverage that problems were beginning, I knew I needed to get back to the hospital.

"Driving down Woodward Avenue was a Dali-esque experience, with people milling everywhere, randomly walking in the street and in and out of stores with broken windows. There was neither rhyme nor reason. It looked chaotic, but I had no idea of how bad it would get.

"All the buildings on the Henry Ford campus are connected by an underground tunnel, and that night I walked through it to the 17-story HFH clinic building with some fellow student nurses. We took the elevator to the top floor to get a better view of what was happening.

"The city that I love, the place I was born and had lived my whole life looked like it had been bombed.

"There was so much anger exploding.

"My heart hurt.

"My soul hurt.

"The National Guard was stationed in the HFH parking garage and tanks patrolled the campus perimeter. Snipers shot at the nurse's dorm so we crawled on the floor whenever we approached an outside window. We worked 18-hour shifts with six hours rest per day for that entire week. But inside the hospital was an island of sanity surrounded by a sea of erupted anger and despair. We were all shades of skin color, ethnic origins and religions, working together to take care of the sick in our care.

"African-American colleagues would risk their lives to get to work to take care of patients.

"We focused on what we had in common and



**John M. Galloway / Special to The Detroit News**

Deborah Reed says many of the businesses in her neighborhood were never restored. "This is what you have now," she says. [See full image](#)



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not our differences. For a young, impressionable student nurse, it was a vision of what could be and the best that humanity had to offer. It was -- and still is -- the real Detroit. There and then I made a personal commitment to be part of the solution of healing -- not just bodies, but the healing of spirit in this great city, the city I still love. My entire career has been devoted in one way or another to this personal mission, as I have worked in Detroit for all but one year since that Sunday of 1967.

"Today, 40 years have passed, and the healing may finally just be starting. Optimism is a choice. Hope is a choice. Positive action is a choice. What part of the solution will you commit to? What choices will you make? What actions will you take? I've made mine, and I'm staying! When we relocated our headquarters in 2001, we could build anywhere, and we chose to build in Detroit and bring 150 jobs to the city. We all need to be part of the solution."

"I was living in the Brewster Projects, across the street from the supermarket named the Big Dipper. As I heard my mother and father calling all of the kids to come downstairs so we could all go to the basement, I looked out my window and I could see the Big Dipper had a hole in the side of the brick wall.

"People were going in and out with everything from food to the safe. When it was happening, it was unbelievable. I thought the world was coming to an end. It was really frightening and I thought this would never end.

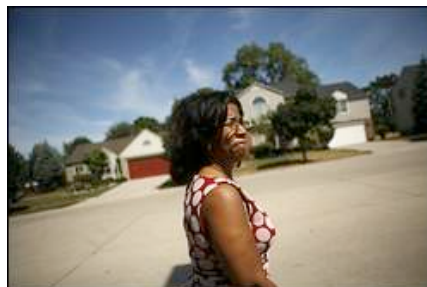
"After the riots we had to drive down Jefferson past Van Dyke to go shopping at Great Scott supermarket. That was when I first saw racism. The white people in the store looked at us with such hatred and I didn't know why because we were not a part of the riots."

Jones said his family worried for two days while his father was missing. In 1965, his father got a job with the city's water department and went to work after the curfew during the riots. That's when police picked him up, Jones said. He said his father was kept at Belle Isle along with others after the city's jails had filled.

"(The riots) made me have a lot more understanding of my people because the result was we suffered. We couldn't go to the Big Dipper anymore. Life as we knew it was changing. We really destroyed our own livelihood and environment. I've tried to live my life trying to manage my emotions."

"I was in the heart of it at the tender age of 10 years old. We had moved to Seward and our apartment building was about five or six

**Detroit's racial divide, 40 years later**



**Elizabeth Conley The Detroit News**  
Vanessa Bradford remembers looking out of a window and seeing a man carrying a tray full of meat that looked like it came from a grocery store. She felt both sorry and happy for him.  
[See full image](#)



**Ricardo Thomas / The Detroit News**  
Richard Jones Jr. says he first experienced racism when his family went grocery shopping.  
[See full image](#)

buildings down from 12th Street. I wasn't feeling too happy about moving there, because the apartments were so small and I didn't know anyone.

"After we were all moved in, I decided to walk to the neighborhood corner store for an ice cream. There were two stores, on each side of the street; one was a liquor store and the other a drug store. After our second day living there, I began to hear rumors. My mother and her friends were talking about how the store on that corner had been burnt down to the ground, and people were looting in the streets. "I remember feeling very curious and excited on the inside. I just couldn't understand how a store I just visited one day ago (could) disappear and be gone! So, I decided to walk there and see it for myself.

"As I got closer and closer, I noticed a huge gap in the ground where the store used to be. It looked as if a bomb had ripped right through it. I felt a cold chill run through my body and a sick, scary feeling in the pit of my stomach that my life could be in danger.

"I ran home. Each day, no one knew what to expect next. I remember one day looking out of the back window and seeing a man carrying a long white tray full of meat that look like it came from a grocery store.

"I felt sorry and happy for the man at the same time. Sorry because he looked so poor and happy because he had food for his family. After a couple of days had passed, I had the nerve and courage to walk up again to 12th Street.

"As I walked down 12th, people were running everywhere with blank looks on their faces. I sensed fear in the air and excitement about what was going on around us. My curiosity kept me walking and finally, I ended near a grocery store.

"I was afraid to go into the store, so I stood there watching everyone else. I remember thinking that since I was a little girl no one would bother me.

"Little did I know that a 4-year-old girl named Tanya Blanding had been killed as a result from gunfire from the National Guard. Although the civil rights movement assisted in bringing major changes, we as a community are still suffering from self-hatred, black-on-black crime and little or no unity. Hopefully, by working together and educating ourselves can we achieve success for our children's future."

"My mother was driving me over to my best friend's house when the news came on the radio. I had a one-track mind.

"We were driving down Warren and 12th Street and there were buildings on fire all around. But being 16, what did I know? I had to get where I wanted to go. I really didn't understand what was going on.

"By the time we made it over to my friend's house, who lived on Delmar on the North End, every major street was blocked due to the fires and people looting stores. Needless to say, we had to go back home.

"My mother was fussing at me. The street I lived on really didn't have a lot going on, but after the president sent the National Guard in, they would drive down the street.

"The city had a curfew and if you were caught out after the curfew you would be arrested. I remember a car going down the street after the curfew and the National Guard stopped the car and pulled the driver out and beat him.



**John M. Galloway / Special to The Detroit News**

Steve Teagan says his dad told him "society was crumbling." They fled to Livingston County. [See full image](#)

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"Looking back on it, the city changed. On Grand River and Tireman, there used to be a furniture store. You could see people with a couch or a sofa on their back. It was unbelievable. People were just crazy.

"A lot of things aren't there anymore. There was a Cunningham's on the corner, a dress shop, all that stuff never came back.

"It makes me sad because what it ended up doing is that all the things that were burned, it was never restored. People were burning up their own neighborhood. It was sad. A lot of people were killed, arrested or what have you. It didn't do any good.

"Nobody really benefited from it. It did open up a bit, but I don't think that it was the right way to do it. The ones who were able to leave, they left. This is what you have now."

"From the right field bleachers we could see out over the city and saw a number of small fires starting and (heard) a lot of sirens and police activity.

"We left the game knowing something was going on, but we had no idea what or why. Dad drove west on Grand River Avenue dodging threats, insults and bricks thrown by people we had never seen before.

"I was kind of scared but more buried in not understanding, because as far as I was concerned, it just popped out of nowhere. A large chunk of cement bounced off the rear of the car and my father downshifted and sped up, ignoring the traffic lights and other traffic.

"My dad's mom had a house about three miles west of Tiger Stadium, and we were supposed to stop there after the game for her famous meat pie and pineapple upside-down cake, so we were really disappointed we had to just get out of town.

"He told us later that society was crumbling before us and he did what he had to do to protect his family. We dodged our way west to the safety of Livingston County.

"I was a rebellious 17-year-old kid at the time with a typically liberal view on racial matters. I think there were two or three black kids in all of Brighton High School in 1967 and I was interested in how those kids would act when we got back to school.

"I remember thinking how difficult it must be for them surrounded by white classmates. I believe the blacks I knew felt embarrassed to be thought of as part of the rioters. I'm sure their lives were made more difficult by the rioting.

"White Detroiters felt ambushed and resented the idea that the rioting was in response to their actions. At a personal level, the rioting and its aftermath built a wall between the races.

"I could feel the reluctance of the black kids to discuss the issue even though a number of us whites were more than a little curious about them. Today, I see the civil rights movement as a force actively hostile to equal rights and working toward a system of racial spoils."

"One of my earliest memories in life is watching Detroit burn. I was only 4 at the time, but my dad, who was a student at the University of Detroit at the time, took me down to the river.

"I remember him saying to me, 'Look at what's happening, look at the smoke, look at the people.'

"I can still picture the smoke.

"I bet you find that with a lot of people in Windsor. Things were quiet here, but we were so physically close it was like watching a movie."

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