

Herman, simply the best

HERMAN WRIGHT SR. was as good a person as I have ever known. I was privileged to count him as a friend.

We spent lots of time talking about many things, but mostly we talked about our community and about people who had contributions to make and how to get people to pull together. Herman was always filled with "let's find a way to get this done."

Sometimes he came by my office for a short visit to drop off something about a project in which he was involved and we'd spend a couple of hours talking about it, always expanding to other Jasper needs and how they might be met.

Occasionally, we'd get to go to lunch together but the result was always the same — talking for two or three hours about how to get things done in the community.

There were many memorable times with Herman but two stand out because they said to me, "You are my friend."

One occurred a number of years ago at the Chamber of Commerce banquet. Herman was named Jasper's Outstanding Citizen. I was so thrilled for him because I knew it not only was well-deserved but long overdue.

When the banquet adjourned, I headed toward Herman's table to congratulate him. As I was doing so, he said, "I want to introduce you to my son."

I turned and saw a young man a few feet away, watching and enjoying his father very much. As I stepped toward him with my hand out and started saying, "Hi, I'm...", Herman Jr. smiled and said, "I know who you are. I know all about you."

The other time was sad but made a statement nonetheless about a man and his commitment to relationships and friendships. Herman came to tell me he had an illness that was going to be debilitating and that he was going home.

Selfishly, I thought, "But, who am I going to try ideas out on? Who am I going to listen to and learn from about getting things done?"

Potential was an important word in Herman Wright's vocabulary.

He saw that term grow exponentially in the accomplishments of his two children, Herman Jr. and Yolanda. Our visits were always filled with reports and/or tales of their exploits and accomplishments.

Unfortunately, I've not yet had the pleasure of knowing Yolanda but I have spent enough time with Herman Jr. to know he is of the same cut of cloth as his father. And as he puts it, he has been a passionate observer of his father since he

was a small child. He says of his father, he was "an ordinary man who lived an extraordinary life."

Indeed he did. He went into the Army as it was desegregating and needed black officers. Herman led troops in two wars and other more limited engagements. He and his family lived on three continents.

Herman Sr. was successful in business. He was a leader in every sense of the word and he left an indelible mark on Jasper. And, he did so because he not only had a strong faith in God but he also had faith in people and the goodness they could show when they came together for a good cause. Herman was absolutely great at rallying people together for a good cause.

He led the Jasper Independent School District through some trying times and his 17 years as president of the board of trustees were eventful because of his amazing ability to forge consensus and to do as his motto said, "Do what is right and ought to be." He applied that to everything he did.

As an inveterate watcher of people, I am particularly focused on eyes and facial expressions. You learn so much about people that way. I learned about Herman by watching his eyes and his face. Herman's eyes were almost always smiling whether his face was or not. Many times, I thought Herman's expressions reflected a basic shyness. But, I remember a particularly peaceful look on his face as I watched him and his beloved Greater New Bethel Baptist Church Men's Choir sing. His smile reflected total peace and happiness and I watched him watch some of his fellow choristers. And, I knew Herman wasn't shy, just an humble believer trying to lead people to "do right."

Our front page story today and, hopefully, this column deliver some tribute to a man who helped this community immensely. However, there has been a plan for some time now to recount not only Herman Wright Sr.'s journey in life but a number of people who came up through the Mt. Union school and have been successful.

There is a three-part documentary being developed by Herman Jr.

Our Pride issue Feb. 15 has a theme, "From Jasper and proud of it." An integral part of that issue will be a detailed story of Herman Wright Sr.'s life, of that Mt. Union School, of the "long black line" that came out of there and through Prairie View A&M, on the way to great lessons for the generations that have followed.

I miss my friend, Herman, and mourn his passing but I will be eternally grateful for the way he touched my life and for the fine son who survives him with great lessons to reveal.

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