

## WASP Like Me

By Dr. Nancy Laine Price

My public high school in Fort Worth, Texas, was completely segregated, completely WASP. We were public but preppy so that anyone not headed for college was rerouted to the technical high school after junior high. Although my home was located just blocks from an African-American neighborhood, we never saw each other, never "cut through " each other's neighborhoods. Ditto my undergraduate experience.

Once married and possessed of two degrees, I found myself in Jefferson City, Missouri, teaching grades 7-12 in a laboratory school run by Lincoln University, historically African American. In my interview, the principal asked me which kind of English I would teach: standard or black. Every student, administrator, and teacher except me and the math teacher, also a white woman, was black. Some of the sillier kids wanted the two of us to fight to see who would win. This was my first experience as a member of a racial minority.

When I went to teach at the lab school, some whites had told me, "Well, you may not be prejudiced now, but you will be by the end of the year." I loved my students, however, and the only prejudice I acquired was toward teaching seventh grade because they told me every single day that my car was rolling down the hill (yes, I fell for it the first time).

While working for and attending Lincoln as a graduate student in adult ESL, I never felt the necessity to play a part or be dishonest. The biggest difference between this school and others I'd attended was the cheers at football games. At my other colleges, our cheers had been rather tame, even lame: "Raider Power"; "We're gonna go/ We're gonna fight/ We're gonna win this game tonight." At LU the cheers were loud, confrontational, and alliterative, my first personal experience with "the dozens," stadium-style. My favorite was "Get back, get back / Get back to the woods/ Your team ain't got no talent and your coach ain't no good!" The band not only marched and played in formation but DANCED as well.

Even though Lincoln is now an integrated university, the social events and the publications, especially the alumni magazine, clearly reflect African-American traditions and predominantly black faces. I learned at Lincoln that being a member of a minority need not necessarily be a negative experience but can be an enriching one. My studies in African-American literature had prepared me to accept and enjoy a new culture. In spite of genetics and history, my teachers, classmates, and students at Lincoln University had made me into a better teacher and a "round character," as we say in literature. Jim Crow had turned into a dove.