



January 18, 2010

## 'From Fear to Understanding'

*Jordan Johnson*

Editor's note: Jordan Johnson is the first-place winner in an essay contest sponsored by the local NAACP to mark Martin Luther King, Jr. Day. Jordan is a student at Pipkin Middle School.



Jordan Johnson is a 7<sup>th</sup> Grader at Pipkin Middle School. His Communication Arts teacher is Mrs. Ann Steinberg.

The great Martin Luther King once said that "Men hate each other because they fear each other; they fear each other because they do not know each other; they do not know each other because they do not communicate; they do not communicate because they are separate." My grandmother, Gladys Young, has had an experience that relates to this phrase. During this time lots of racism was going on in this part of the world. Her story is the topic of my essay.

My grandmother was a US Postal worker. She was the first African American female to work for the Postal Service in a full time position. She was hired after a long Equal Employment complaint. On my grandma's first day at the post office no one talked to her. Everyone just observed her presence. Note the fact that she was the only African American there. She hadn't worked seven days before people damaged her car. Someone scratched crosses on her hood, knocked her side mirrors off, and put sticks in her gas tank. These people never communicated with my grandma so they hated her. After this incident all of my family told my grandma to leave this job. My grandma told them "Nothing ever changes if you run away from the problem." Until my grandma retired she never left the postal service.

My grandma experienced lots of harassment at the post office. When she would be in her work area she would hear "N-word" this and "N-word" that. Black balloons with "N-word" stickers were put into her work area. My grandma fought back against the racism though. She didn't do anything that would get her fired because this was a high paying job. My grandma would either ignore the people or say things that would make people be quiet.

My grandma started attending American Postal Workers Union meetings. There she joined an organization called P.O.W.E.R. The organization fought for women's equal rights. At a convention in Albany, New York, my grandmother was elected a National Officer in the American Postal Workers Union. When she got back from New York, the Post Office provided her with a bulletin board. The board was located at the entrance of the work room. Everyone saw the bulletin board no matter what color you were. The board allowed her to communicate with everyone about events happening in the world. After my grandma started writing on the board, more people started talking to her. More people started making friends with her. Most of the people that didn't talk to my grandma at first were the ones at the end that were real best friends. My grandma still talks to most of them. The key to people making friends with my grandma was communication. If people hadn't talked to my grandma, they would have never got to know her and think she was a great person.

A lot of people today judge people by the way they look and they misunderstand them. Lots of people lose opportunities to meet great people because they don't communicate. The people who communicated with my grandmother realized she was a great person.