

March 15, 2023

PEACE AND JUSTICE BLOG
SUBJECT: 2300 BAKER STREET PART 1
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While the Muskegon community may have no more overt racial discrimination, it has yet a high level of subtle discrimination.

I have the privilege of pastoring a church in the neighborhood, where I spent my formative years. I walked by the church at 2400 Sanford St. twice a day for the three years I attended Muskegon Heights High School.

I was five years old when we moved into our home in the 2300 block of Howden St. We moved there six months prior to me starting kindergarten. We were surrounded by family, good neighbors, and friends. I still stay in touch with friends from the neighborhood, friends I have known for 70 years.

I am sharing two incidents I experienced when our family moved from Howden St. to Baker St. I was nine years old and just six weeks from completing 4th grade at Lindbergh Elementary School. May 3, 1958, was a proud day for my parents. It was moving day into our new home in the 2300 block of Baker St. My parents were able to invest in a larger home. They were very excited about how much more spacious our new home was, compared to the small, cramped home we were living in.

In our new neighborhood we were the third black family in that block. Our move to Baker St. was less than one half mile from our old home. This home had all the amenities my parents wanted, and I would not have to change schools. As I walked down the street and admired the homes in our new neighborhood the thing I remember most, 65 years later, were the trees on our street, which seemed to form a canopy over the road. It is a memory I will never forget.

I was soon brought back to the reality of the time and the part race plays in America, by two children. The neighborhood was 99% white. Most of the people would let you know you were not welcome. Our next-door neighbors in the house to the north of our home introduced me to a racial slur I had never heard before. I had heard the 'N' word a few times during my first year at Lindbergh School, but I had never heard the racial slur Jungle Bunny. I was nine years old and the two children using the racial slur appeared to be seven or eight years old. They were not bashful at all using this term.

About one week after we had been living in our new home. I was on my way home from school. I noticed a group of about five sixth graders were following me. They were saying they didn't want me living in the neighborhood. I was afraid but I never ran. When I got home, I went up on our porch. I turned and confronted the group. My dad heard the commotion and came to the porch and my pursuers all ran away.

No child should have to experience the sting of overt racism. Their parents want what every parent wants for their children. What is alarming to me is this strong attitudinal prejudice against black people!