

## **A Daufuskie Island Lad in an Academic Community: An Extraordinary Journey of Personal Transformation**

J. Herman Blake, Medical University of South Carolina<sup>1</sup>  
Ervin R. Simmons, Daufuskie Island, South Carolina<sup>2</sup>

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### **Abstract**

A new and unique academic community in an elite public university offers an educational opportunity to young people from underprivileged homes and with poor educational preparation. In this setting a young man from one of America's most isolated and unique communities not only obtains an excellent education, he also experiences profound social changes as a result of the faculty, staff and students he encounters daily. Raised and socialized to survive in a rural setting of woods and waters, he becomes an example of how a college of character can have a transforming impact on students.

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### **Beginnings: Oakes College and Daufuskie Island—J.Herman's Story**

**A**fter graduate study at the Berkeley campus of the University of California, I began my academic career at the Santa Cruz campus in 1966. As an aspiring demographer, my goals were to become an outstanding scholar on population patterns in Latin America and the Sociology of Race/Ethnicity in the United States. This scholarship goal included a comprehensive analysis of history and life in African American communities.

I made my first trip to Daufuskie Island, South Carolina, in the summer of 1967, less than a year into my new position as a scholar and professor. There was no regular ferry service from the public landing in Bluffton, South Carolina, to Daufuskie Island, and there were no accommodations for visitors. With some difficulty I was able to arrange a boat to take me to the island, and a local resident, Mrs. Viola Bryan provided overnight accommodations and meals. The African American community I met on this (5 by 2 miles) island left an indelible impact on me, and I began regular visits. Often I

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<sup>1</sup> Currently the Inaugural Humanities Scholar in Residence at the Medical University of South Carolina. J. Herman Blake was the founding Provost (Dean) of Oakes College at the University of California Santa Cruz from 1972-1984. He received a B.A. (Sociology) from New York University and a M.A. and Ph.D. (Sociology) from the University of California Berkeley.

<sup>2</sup> Ervin "Rick" Simmons received his B.A. in Sociology from Oakes College at the University of California, Santa Cruz in 1982. He continues residence on Daufuskie Island, South Carolina, where he has become a leader in a collectivity of native islanders who seek to maintain their cultural heritage and identity. He is also employed as a social worker in Savannah, Georgia. In addition to his professional and community work, he continues to pursue educational opportunities.

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stayed for a few days, and then those days became months, until I finally spent 14 months on the island during a sabbatical.

In 1967 I did not anticipate the degree to which my faculty work at the University would become intertwined with my research and service on Daufuskie Island. I completed two monographs (unpublished) about life and labor of the Black residents of the unique island. One of them I entitled “The Exiles”—arguing the residents were “exiles” from their ancestral homelands in Africa, where many of their parents and grandparents were born, and they were also “exiles” from mainstream America because of their physical isolation. In 1967 most of the residents had no running water, and few had electricity or other modern conveniences. Even fewer had motor transportation—people traveled by foot, oxcarts, or rode horses and cows. The geographical separation from mainland America meant Daufuskie Island residents lived a double Diaspora.

In 1969 two years after my first trip to Daufuskie Island, the administration of the University of California at Santa Cruz invited me to co-chair (with Dr. Ralph Guzman) a faculty committee that would plan and develop the seventh undergraduate college at UCSC, scheduled to open in 1972.

The faculty planning committee was a unique collection of scholars. Ralph Guzman was a Chicano. Born in Mexico, Guzman originally came to the United States as a *bracero* and ultimately earned a Ph.D. in political science at UCLA. Dilip Basu was a native of India and taught history at the university. Roberto Crespi was a product of Spanish Harlem with a Ph.D. in literature from Harvard. William Doyle with a Ph.D. in biology was one of the founding faculty members at the University of California at Santa Cruz and an excellent teacher as well as scholar. Doyle was the only Anglo among the planners.

We quickly decided to pursue a much more diverse and (presumably) under-prepared student body than was usual for the university, but offer these non-traditional students a traditional liberal arts curriculum of the highest quality. Guzman and I expressed a desire to develop a strong academic program in the sciences for the students we envisioned. Doyle offered unique ideas about how we could inaugurate a creative and effective program in the sciences even though our students might arrive with limited preparation. We also gave serious thought to the kind of faculty the program would require.

Ultimately we recruited a student body that was about 35 percent African American and Latino, and a smaller number of under-prepared Anglo students. The remainder of our students were from traditional California backgrounds, most of them, I believed, from middle to upper-class families. Our faculty was about 50 percent minority. Thirty percent of the faculty members were women. It was a very diverse and unique academic community for the University of California.

Opening in 1972, the faculty of Oakes College determined we had to build strong bonds of unity and friendship among ourselves if we were to be successful with our very diverse student body. We had to be models of what we expected of them. Our sense of responsibility to the students meant that we had to hold them to very high academic expectations, while treating them in a kind and collegial manner. Our sense of responsibility to the university and our disciplines meant we had to hold ourselves to high expectations in our research, as well as in the teaching and mentoring of students. It was

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a very unique academic community within the heart of one of America's top research universities.

I continued regular visits to Daufuskie Island while planning and developing Oakes College. As well, I arranged for Santa Cruz students to serve the Daufuskie community through academic internships in community service. Each quarter from 1968 through the early 1980s two students would spend an entire term living in the homes of one of the residents and working in community-led activities. Often these students would work with Daufuskie youth on their homework assignments. One of the Santa Cruz students wrote me a poignant letter about his experience—sitting at night in a home around a table tutoring youth under the light of kerosene lamps.

On my trips to Daufuskie I would visit the homes of families where I conducted interviews of the adults. Occasionally I would go to the two-room schoolhouse to give motivational talks to the students. The Santa Cruz students—as well as I—had extraordinary experiences on Daufuskie Island. What is more, Daufuskie Island youth often talked with the Santa Cruz students about educational opportunities beyond the eight grades their two room school provided—we always promoted education.

It was in this context that three Daufuskie youth approached me in 1976 and expressed a desire to enter the University of California Santa Cruz and study at Oakes College. Ervin Simmons was one of those young people.

Fortunately I had just met a businessman in Savannah, Georgia, whose family history extended back into Daufuskie Island and the slave-holding era. He told me if I found a way he could help me in my work, he was willing to make a financial contribution. When I told him about the desires of these youth he agreed to provide full financial support for them—including out-of-state tuition, room, board, and educational supplies. He also agreed to pay their air-fares from Savannah to San Francisco, including a round-trip ticket so they could come home for Christmas. Each year he deposited the necessary funds in an account at the University of California at Santa Cruz, and insisted on complete anonymity. When Ervin Simmons graduated from Oakes College, he provided additional funds for his parents and siblings to attend the ceremony.

As a result of the success Oakes College experienced with California youth from low-performing high schools, we were able to get the provisional admission for the three Daufuskie Island students. After living in my home their first quarter, the three students moved into the college residence halls (all apartments) and continued their educational pursuits. They responded well to the student environment as well as to faculty expectations. Although a number of the faculty had visited Daufuskie Island with me and understood the conditions there, none of the faculty fully knew or understood the inner feelings of these youth—they were seen as members of the Oakes College community. Like all the other students, they were held to very high expectations. At the same time we supported and encouraged them as much as possible.

### **Beginnings: Daufuskie Island—Ervin's Story**

**M**y formative years took place in an isolated island community of African Americans who had relatively little interaction with the larger American society except through radio, television, and occasional trips to the mainland. Although we lacked a full

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understanding, we were an intimate part of the Gullah traditions of the descendants of Africans enslaved in the region who maintained many of their unique cultural features.

Although there was a small community of Whites on the island, our interaction with them was extremely limited—sometimes friendly between the women while often adversarial between the men. My family consisted of my parents, four brothers, and one sister. My maternal and paternal grandparents as well as other relatives lived nearby and were intimately involved in my formative experiences. I learned my childhood lessons well.

In my earliest years I was very close to my mother. During her talks with other women in our community, I would stay in the background while listening and observing very carefully. They paid little attention to me. I developed a sharp sense of discerning people's feelings beyond what they actually said or did. The men in the community seldom gave women credit for insights and understandings, but that did not stop the women from talking and planning. Often it was the women who brought the pressures that led the men to confront Whites for justice. As they talked late into the night hours, they were often planning for us their children, for their husbands, and against Whites. The women knew how to change any time a man or child came into their hearing. They would deftly shift the conversation to fishing, planting, or something far off when the wrong person walked up. I listened when they never suspected I was watching them.

My mother and my four grandparents gave me my earliest foundations in education. The grandparents followed our progress in school very carefully and insisted we do well in our studies. My paternal grandfather—Jake Simmons—had to leave school as a child to work and support his parents. He could neither read nor write. Of the many lessons he taught me, one of the most important was the significance of education and learning. He monitored our school attendance very carefully, and one of his mandates was that we should never skip school—absence was never acceptable for any reason.

My mother insisted that we do our homework every day as well as attend all our school sessions. Like Grandpa Jake she would never let us skip school. In the early 1960s, it was common for the lights to go out for several days at a time in the winter months. Electricity was still a new phenomenon with us, the island was almost all Black, and when a tree fell on the lines, the light company did not rush to make repairs. My mother never allowed any excuses for failure to complete our homework. She had lots of kerosene lamps in the house, and it was not unusual for us to sit under lamps at night reading and spelling. Momma was serious about us doing our homework under the lamps.

I learned valuable survival skills from my father and grandfathers. While they stressed education, they also taught me the skills that would allow me to take care of a family. By the time I was an adolescent, I was skilled in hunting, trapping, fishing, crabbing, and casting the shrimp net. I was equally comfortable in my little boat (bateau) in the waters around the island, and in the woods, hunting deer and raccoons, or trapping otters and minks. I also learned how to maintain and operate a still, making moonshine whiskey that we sold to selected customers. My daddy's largest still "ran" about 25 barrels and produced up to 250 gallons of moonshine.

I did excellent work in school as well as in the natural environment. I even learned how to combine them to ensure greater success. Reading and spelling were

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dominant in school. Every day we had to learn ten new words and spell them correctly. I always wrote my ten words on a paper and took them hunting with me. In the woods I would sing out the words to myself until they came naturally when I had to stand up in class and spell.

Our school went from grades 1-8 and only had two rooms. We had two teachers—one of them, Miss Frances Jones, was a Daufuskie Island native. She was very demanding and strict, but I quickly learned that once a student established he was serious and made high grades the teacher gave that person breaks. My parents and grandparents pushed me, and I made very high grades—in fact I was the top student in every class. I was particularly good in arithmetic. I had come across something on Benjamin Banneker and felt I wanted to go further in the study of mathematics.

In my last year of elementary school—8<sup>th</sup> grade—we had our first male teacher. He was also White. He was an energetic and enthusiastic person as well as an excellent teacher. I continued to follow the guidance of my parents and grandparents and graduated as the valedictorian of the class.

To me, life was good. I had excelled in the classroom, and I was doing well outside of school. In the early years sitting in school around the wood stove in the winter months, tightly bunched into a circle, we felt warmth and a sense of family among ourselves even though it was extremely cold outside. Many of us were from the same family or related in one way or another. The island was a safe nest for me; I did not feel like I was poor or educationally deprived.

On Daufuskie Island when students finished the 8<sup>th</sup> grade they had to move to the mainland to attend high school. They had to leave family and live with strangers in a new environment. As one of those students, my safe nest was destroyed, and high school was a very different life. I went to three different high schools, and my world was more uncertain; however, my educational aspirations remained high in spite of low performance. I graduated from high school toward the bottom of the class.

My first thought was to enter the military because my academic confidence was shaken. However, my father—a man of very few words—did not approve of that decision. He had served in the army in Germany and did not find it a pleasant experience. He did not tell me what to do; he quietly said, “The military is no place for a colored man.”

Social experiences during high school left me searching for understanding of issues beyond the guiding hands of my parents and grandparents. Family was still a force, but my ideas were expanding. I sought to understand my Black identity; I was seeking answers relating to how we could put up a strong fight against racism and social injustice.

With the encouragement and strong support of my girlfriend, I enrolled in a small Black college in another state. It offered me a Black community atmosphere I thought would be similar to the community and family on Daufuskie Island. I could study mathematics while also pursuing answers to racism and injustice; I could strengthen my Black identity.

I met Black youth from cities and states I had known only from reading. They had different experiences from mine, but we were all seeking to know ourselves. As I began the wider search in my freshman year in college, I reached beyond the classroom,

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attending discussions in the community and meetings of radical groups. I read about Black protest and revolutionary movements like the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense, and the Black Muslims. Soon I joined the Nation of Islam and became a follower of Elijah Muhammad and Louis Farrakhan. I came to new understandings about racism and the White people who caused so many of our problems and kept us in psychological bondage.

I also learned that my girlfriend back home was pregnant. At the end of the school year my first child—a son—was born. I left college to return home to work and help support my son. I named him Fard Ervin Simmons Jr. He would symbolize my growing identity as a Black man as well as my deep roots within my family. After a year working in menial jobs, I turned my attention back to college.

### **Oakes College—UCSC: A Daufuskie Lad in an Academic Community**

**T**here was a gentleman from California who made regular visits to Daufuskie Island. He spent time with the elderly people in the community, including my grandparents, interviewing them about their lives.

We knew him as Professor (“Fessor”) Blake. Eventually he bought a house on the island and spent even more time in the community. He approached three of us, Johnnie Roberts, Claudia Stewart, and me. He told us he was the Provost (Dean) of a college in California, and if we were interested, he would see if we could be admitted. He said he could raise the money to pay our tuition, living expenses, and travel. He also said he lived in a large house on the campus, and we could live with him and his family our first year as we made the transition to the new environment. It was like a dream come true, and each of us accepted his offer. We were admitted to the University of California Santa Cruz, where we would study at Oakes College—the one headed by “Fessor” Blake.

While I was “over-excited” about going to California, I was uneasy about living with strangers again. I was a little torn about leaving my girlfriend Louise Martin and my young son, Fard. However, Louise was 100 percent behind my educational development. My mother was totally behind my going away. Although she never said it, I believe Momma saw me as fulfilling her broken dream of going off to Rachel Mather Academy in Beaufort, South Carolina. By the accounts of all her classmates from Maryfields Elementary School, Momma was academically a shining star. I was departing Daufuskie Island with the spirits of many people. The most beloved was my grandfather, Jake Simmons, who could not read. I wanted to be able to come back home and handle my people’s papers without them turning to White folks. Granddaddy wanted us to have a better life—not being forced to work outside in the cold.

Once I got past the fascination of my first plane ride, I was first impressed by being in a house so filled with books. As “Fessor’s” wife was showing me to my room, I could not help slowing down to scan the many books on the shelves. One book in particular caught my attention. It was the hardback copy of *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. A million things were starting to run through my head. I had no idea of the radical changes I was going to encounter, nor did I anticipate the world of diversity I was entering. I was internally nervous.

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The winter quarter of 1977 started a new phase in my life. I was now at the University of California, Santa Cruz (Oakes College), starting on an academic quarter system with a lot on my mind. I was fully aware of a few things: (1) writing was going to be a challenge for me; (2) adjustment was going to take some time; and (3) I was going to live in the home of the Provost (Dean).

In another sense, I was also under pressures from within: (1) I had expectations of my own; (2) I had people back on Daufuskie Island I did not want to disappoint; and (3) I knew the present was going to hold me to a high level of academic expectations.

I had to wrestle with the constant internal pressures of success and failure. I wanted to excel and yet I feared failure on one level. On another level, I often thought of "moving too far away from my old friends and my family." "Fessor's wife" did a great job of making the home relaxing and welcoming. She encouraged my studies and constantly reminded me that "Herman is serious about the academics." She also told me to "please don't bother his books without his permission." I saw that he had a hard backed copy of *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. I was reading some highlighted pages when Mrs. Blake warned me not to get on Herman's wrong side. I had a different logic: Herman believed in education, and he traveled extensively; therefore, how could he be bothered by me examining his books?

My earliest classes included Professor Jan Willis's (African American) special Oakes College Course: "Three Generals in the Lord's Army"; a computer class by Al Stewart (a Black graduate student in physics); and a writing course taught by Professor Donald Rothman. Jan Willis was very young and extremely intelligent. I was particularly impressed by her. Her specialties were Asian Religions (Buddhism) and Sanskrit. Her special course was an analysis of religious ideas in generating slave revolts.

I was now in an environment where the academic approach was different. None of the courses at Santa Cruz were graded. Instead each student received a narrative evaluation analyzing their performance in the class. Normally I was used to studying for a test where the questions were usually true/false or short answers. It was different in the new setting. It seemed as though every test had a "compare-and-contrast" essay. This was a sure test of knowing if the materials were read or not. More importantly, for me, this was a test of expressing myself on paper.

My understandings of the materials were adequate, but I did not even want to expose my writing deficiencies. These professors were usually understanding and helpful. Al Stewart wrote in my evaluation that I should continue working on developing my writing and test taking skills. Jan Willis wrote something like the following: "He has to develop his writing in order to express his ideas on paper." I was fully aware that a University of California campus would expect one to have certain skills and little time to hold anyone's hand. Surprising to me, these professors were different. They made me feel like they really cared and wanted to see me succeed.

I took a statistics course from Dr. Marshall Sylvan, a professor of mathematics. In this essay, I use the title "Dr." but nobody was called "Dr." at this university. They encouraged the students to call them by their first names. This was really different for me. Sylvan was a good teacher, but the lecture hall was so large. The teaching assistants were good. They worked with us in small groups. Sylvan met with me individually and told me to keep asking questions and keep working hard and not to worry so much about

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the tests at this point. This meeting was very encouraging, and it made all the difference in encouraging me to keep pressing on. I really wanted to be a math major because I was best at quantitative thinking. Sylvan encouraged me, but the going was much rougher than I had imagined.

Strange enough, it was not in statistics or pre-calculus that led me to thinking seriously about things I never dreamed would become a central focus of my life. Jan Willis's class "Three Generals in the Lord's Army" pushed my thinking in a new direction. Don Rothman's writing class taught me that being able to put one's ideas on paper was powerful. I took a directed reading class from "Fessor" Blake and reading Richard Wright's *Black Boy* and Claude Brown's *Manchild in the Promised Land* really made me think back to my own childhood. A psychology class in "Theories of Personality" caused me to think about various people very close to me, as well as my own personal development. I learned about Carl Jung's "collective consciousness," and it made me think about the power in mass protest and social organization. Dr. Martin Luther King's explanation of Adler's need for the recognition of being first "the drum major" continued to push my reflections about my own background and social development.

This process of reflection was particularly true when I took a course with another Black professor, Arthur Spears. In his linguistics course I discovered that the word "bastard" had other uses than merely to refer to a child that was born out of wedlock or fathered by someone's husband. "That little bastard" must have been a bitter pill for an innocent child to swallow. Looking back, I now can imagine the burden some of my friends must have felt by carrying the scar "bastard."

I thought about so many things I had never thought of before. The educational process was *painfully beautiful*. I was learning a lot, but I did not think I was learning because my papers were always full of red marks. I was often torn about many things. Oakes College really put me through some changes, but I felt blessed at the opportunity. I thought that God must have sent "Fessor" Blake to "Fuskie" for a reason. At times I became sad and wanted to stop the journey. However, I felt compelled to press on because I believed many were depending on me.

The combination of "fear of failure" and "fear of success" was often tough to deal with internally. I was afraid at times, and felt that I was needed back home. I knew for certain that I wanted to please at least one person besides myself and that was Janie Elizabeth Simmons—my mother. I also wanted my sons to feel proud of their father. While the struggle was tough, I now enjoy knowing that I have one son who graduated from Clark-Atlanta University with honors in biology and another son who graduated from North Carolina State University in business management. These accomplishments note progress in the family.

I was fortunate that throughout my journey at Oakes College and Santa Cruz, I was treated with great respect. The students were just damned nice—so many of them. And all of the professors respected me as well even as they were pushing me in my classes. I always got the feeling they really cared about me as a person and wanted to see me become successful. The process was not easy and I have no regrets.

While all professors I encountered at Oakes College and Santa Cruz amazed me with their warm and welcoming demeanors combined with very high expectations, one of

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the most special to me was Professor Ed Dirks. I took "Introduction to World Religions" from Professor Dirks because I wanted a better understanding of the different religions of the world. I came to the class with a high degree of skepticism following my experiences in the Nation of Islam. This class was relatively small, perhaps 20 students at the most. Racially, the class composition was very diverse. I only remember one other Black student from New York.

Professor Dirks was a neat dresser. He was clearly in command of his subject matter. He had lived and studied in practically every country of the various religions we studied. His class was always exciting because he never took a position toward any one faith. He was absolutely fair when it came to presenting the different religions. As we walked through the 10 weeks on the quarter system, we examined the world's monotheistic religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. We equally examined five other religions. I had a keen interest in Buddhism because I had become so moved by the Black professor Jan Willis who was a Buddhist.

Professor Dirks emphasized the importance of students coming to his office hours if they needed clarification on any subject issues. His personality was one of "realness." The man was sincere. During the section on Christianity, he raised the question: "Was Jesus human or was he divine?" It was a question to guide our thinking. Actually it was a question to help us think. The students were quite involved in the subject matter. The students in this class were also quite advanced; many had lived and traveled abroad. He played chanting from various countries that he recorded when he lived there. He took a personal interest in each student. He was a master at his work.

It was near midterm examination that I went to see Professor Dirks in his office. I did not go for help. I went to talk to him about his experiences and his understanding of the "Muslims" without revealing to him that I was personally involved in "Nation Affairs." He was so glad that I came. I asked him about the "Nation" and the Honorable Elijah Muhammad. He told me that he attended a Savior's Day Rally in Chicago where he heard Mr. Muhammad speak. He said: "The old man was a power house." He said you could feel his (Mr. Muhammad's) power. I asked him how he got in. He told me that he was permitted to sit in a small section that was reserved for the White press in which a small group of Whites sat. The interesting thing he told me was that he never felt personally insulted. He said the Muslims treated him with dignity and warm respect. He went on to say the Muslims had every reason to bond with Mr. Muhammad following their experiences. After some two hours of talking with Professor Dirks, I walked away thinking this was an unusual White man. *He was an unusual man period.* He had a keen sense of seeing through things and reaching students. He was a gifted scholar.

Toward the end of the quarter, I had picked up some valuable lessons about human interaction and perceptions. I had come to recognize the close link between the Jews and the Muslims. I had gained a greater appreciation for the Qur'an and the religion of Islam as a way of life as Professor Dirks insisted. Professor Dirks had made a believer of me without him knowing my inner thoughts. He helped me to realize that people are often just reacting to their experiences. He had a deep understanding of people. He was demanding in his class assignments, but always willing to assist the students. I did well in his class. More importantly, I learned a lot in his class, and I was challenged to think in a different way. His style of teaching was unique and thought-provoking. He made

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students think. His style of teaching made us dig deeper into the subject matter. He helped me see the connection between Ishmael and Isaac. We were able to see the kinship between the Jews and the Arabs. I was convinced that every student came out of this class feeling more human toward one another.

At the end of the quarter, as was the custom with the professors at Oakes College, Professor Dirks invited our class to his home for a meal. The food was great. I was most impressed with his mannerisms and his relationship with his wife. He was a real gentleman. He had a magnetic spirit. I just wanted to be around him. He had truly impacted my world.

During my second year in Oakes College, I began to recognize some strange realities. While I was a top speller in elementary school, in college my spelling was poor because I pronounced words differently. Good spelling has much to do with pronunciation of words, and my Gullah understandings did not work for me in California.

I also started to realize that many of the students I thought were so smart were not more intelligent in a true sense. They were taught how to be, as one student told me, “resourceful.” Being resourceful meant the ability to navigate one’s way through the large library easily. Being resourceful meant being involved in study groups. Being resourceful also meant that by participating in study groups one was almost always assured that the study guide questions would show up on the tests. This realization came late for me.

This “resourcefulness” was not limited to White students only. Many of the Black students led the way. One student—Carol Harrison—captured my imagination in class. She was a skilled debater who always challenged the professors and the administration. She was an upperclassman, and I understood she went to law school. I am sure she is still challenging the system. The great thing was the professors encouraged this style of learning. While I was quiet in my earlier years at UCSC, I was nonetheless learning quite a bit. I was so moved by watching Black students lead academically.

I moved into the Oakes College residence halls my second year. They were all apartments with 5 students in each unit. The incredible diversity among Oakes College students meant I was constantly learning in the residence halls as well as in the classrooms. I found myself sharing an apartment with or living next to students from Hispanic, Asian-American and White backgrounds as well as a wide variety of Black students. I had never lived or studied with such students, and we had lots of good conversations about our lives. I found my discomfort with living among such variety began to disappear. There was Juan a Hispanic, Don a Korean from Los Angeles, and Steve was Japanese from the Walnut Creek area. In addition there was Bob a Black student from Oakland.

I wanted to learn more about Hispanics while not being very comfortable with the culture. Juan Rivera, a Chicano from Soledad, California, taught me that Mexico once owned California, Arizona, Texas, and New Mexico. He was serious about the rise of brown people. I loved his stories because I saw the parallels to Blacks in terms of oppression. I joined him in spending many weekends with his family in Soledad—about 40 miles away. His family were very nice and friendly people who believed in having lots of food. They respected the fact that I did not eat pork and always made provisions for me.

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One night Bob Billings—the Black student—and I were talking about growing up. I told Bob that I was having problems with my left arm where I suffered a gunshot wound in a hunting accident on Daufuskie Island some years earlier. I told him that I still had many pieces of lead and bones in my biceps muscles because I was shot with a hollow point bullet in the hunting accident. Without me knowing, Bob called his father and arranged for me to go home with him the upcoming weekend for X-Rays of my arm. I had lived in the apartment with him and had no idea that his father was a renowned bone specialist. Bob had downplayed his background, he later told me; he did not want people to judge him because of who his father was.

Bob and I drove up to his parents' home in his Volkswagen. I liked his VW because I had worked on a shrimp boat the summer before with my uncle, Jake Simmons Jr., and purchased a VW also. Bob told me his father gave him the VW when he was entering college. Along the way he revealed some interesting things to me. He told me that his father's dream was for him to go to medical school and later take over his father's medical practice. He had problems with this. He wanted to create his own way. I told him that I would go for it if it was me. I suddenly realized that Bob had been having problems with seeing that some people were so poor while he was from such a privileged background. I later discovered that this was a problem for many Santa Cruz privileged students, particularly Black students. He also told me that his mother wanted him to date certain types of girls. He had problems with that also. He wanted to be just himself without any special treatment based upon his social status.

Bob drove me to his father's medical complex. His mother and his paternal grandmother worked at the office. His mother only worked part-time. His father came out to meet me. He was very tall and handsome. He told me that Bob had told him so many nice things about me. He was a couple inches taller than Bob, and Bob stood at 6 feet 1 inches. Dr. Billings had the radiologist take me back for X-Rays. When Dr. Billings had read the X-Rays, he came back to meet with me. He told me that the metals and the bone fragments were scattered throughout my muscle. He decided against surgery. He told me that if I took surgery, I would probably lose use of my left arm because he would have to probe in the muscle too much to get over thirty pieces of fragments out. He told me that if I was having too much pain, we could talk further, but he thought I was too young to lose my arm usage. I thanked him. He told me that I was always welcome to his home with his son. He also encouraged Bob to take me to their time-share in Lake Tahoe.

We drove back on Sunday afternoon. His mother stocked us up with plenty of food. Along the drive back to Santa Cruz, I told Bob. I was concerned about the bill. Bob told me something that was very interesting: "My dad doesn't charge my friends. My friends' dads that are doctors, dentists, attorneys, etc, they don't charge me either." Here was another Black boy several years younger than I was. This really touched me. Bob and I went to Lake Tahoe many times.

Christina Simpson was one of several Black female students who also had a great impact on my thinking. I met Christina in 1977 at Oakes College on the University of California-Santa Cruz where she entered as a freshman (or "freshperson"). We took Don Rothman's writing class together. She had a bold spirit. She was naturally good-looking and dressed in mini skirts. It was clear that she was brave with meeting new people.

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Professor Rothman assigned all students to write an essay about their earlier experiences. This was a sample writing to gauge where his class stood in writing. The very next class he returned a sample of what he thought was quality writing. He did not show the student's name. I quickly discovered that the piece that Rothman used belonged to Christina. I took the copy home and read it several times. The thing that stood out was that Christina expressed herself in a simple, clear, and powerful way on paper. I was very impressed by her writing ability.

She told me that she could always write well, but she said: "I am so afraid of math." She was also great at verbally expressing herself. I thought she was quite foxy, but I was still dealing with my "Nation of Islam thinking" that women should be quiet and reserved and conservative. Christina was not even going to hear that kind of talk. She was too independent-minded. She once told me: "Ervin, you can take that [expletive] back to South Carolina...." I concluded that she could never be my personal girlfriend, but I loved her company and her spirit. I was very curious about her upbringing and background.

As Thanksgiving was approaching, Christina asked me what my plans were for the holiday. I told her that I did not have enough money to fly home to South Carolina. She told me that she was going to call her parents and tell them that she wanted to bring Johnnie Roberts (another Daufuskie lad) and me home for Thanksgiving. I was eager to see Los Angeles. I did not really know her well and had reservations about meeting people who might be judgmental. I went with an open mind.

We met Mr. Williams (her step dad), who was the head of TWA Airlines Maintenance, Budget, and Control. At Thanksgiving dinner, Mr. Williams read the *Wall Street Journal*. Their home was a mansion. I thought to myself, "Do Black people live like this?" During dinner, Christina's mother started asking Johnnie and me questions: "Where you guys from?" "What do your parents do for a living?" "What are you majoring in?" I was more interested in my meal. The food was superb. I was fully aware of the questioning intentions. She wanted to know our social status. I cannot remember my answers; I know I told her my major was math. That was true at the time. I ignored the question about my parents.

When we returned to Santa Cruz a few days later, I realized that Christina was from a very privileged background. She was down-to-earth. She did not care about people's backgrounds. I fell in love with that humble personality. She became a friend for life. We have stayed close over the years. She is a friend I can call at anytime. She is now an attorney with the Social Security Administration in Atlanta, Georgia. I realized that Christina entered college with a great deal of self confidence. Unlike me, she believed she could handle anything college dished out. Although she was weak in math, she quickly hired a private tutor for algebra.

For a lad from the remote Gullah community of Daufuskie Island in South Carolina, California was another world. The professors and the courses at Oakes College opened me to ideas and thoughts I did not even know existed. The students I met, socialized, and with whom I studied were from totally different experiences—most of them from groups I had never been around. Many of my social and educational experiences were very painful, and they challenged me to rearrange some of my thoughts.

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I had to confront the fact that life was changing for me and the views of what I held dear were being challenged. I was torn between wanting to have a liberal attitude towards homosexuals and maintaining my hard stance that homosexuality was a sickness. I wanted to know more about Hispanic people. I had never studied with Asian-American students. *I was not accustomed to nude beaches.* I went to the nude beach to witness it, and I was the only one with clothes on. It seemed like there were thousands of people on the beach, and I was the only one with clothes on. All this was part of my educational journey. It was not an easy journey, but it was a necessary journey.

Looking back, I now realize that I was truly blessed to have studied in a diverse university setting where I could get an excellent education as well as a much broader appreciation for the human relations in a diverse society. At the end of the journey I asked myself what impact this had on me, and I am still drawing conclusions.

Education tends to cut through class division. Education gives us the ability to handle complex issues with a high degree of confidence. Education can equip us with the intellectual and social skills to help other disadvantaged people in a real faithful way because we believe it is possible to make the changes. An education of high quality can not only change an individual, it has the potential of changing generations.

### **Conclusion: Daufuskie Lad and a Professor**

**J**Herma—The account by Ervin Simmons gives me even greater understanding of his academic sojourn at Oakes College, as well as the historical and social context in which he operated. Questions that were mysteries to me—his physical ailments for one—are clearer. While his solid determination and persistence were evident, I had little understanding of his emotional turmoil.

I find it humbling to realize that I met and interviewed his grandparents—Richmond and Geneva Wiley; Jake and Lillie Simmons—and spent time in their homes. Some of the memories of our experiences are moving and profound. I knew they had strong feelings about education, but they said little about the demands and expectations they placed on their grandchildren. The lessons about the past I have gained from reading Ervin's story give me even greater respect for his parents and grandparents. They understood the limits of their physical circumstances, but they never succumbed to their conditions. They built their futures in the lives of the youth. Ervin Simmons has fulfilled the faith and trust they placed in him as the promise of the future.

**Ervin**—Graduation from Oakes College was a new beginning for me. I was so glad my mother—Janie Elizabeth Simmons—could be there to witness me receiving my diploma, to see me living up to all her hopes and dreams, her hard work. My sister Georgia and my brother Willis were also there. They met many of my professors as well as many of my student friends. It felt like the circle was closing, like the different ends were connected.

I stay in touch with the different parts of my life. I see some of my California friends from time to time—some of them have come to visit me on Daufuskie Island. Recently Donald Rothman and Ronald Saufley, two of my Oakes College professors, came to South Carolina, and we had a great reunion in Beaufort and also on Daufuskie Island.

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My early life on Daufuskie still impacts me. I continue to “run” my crab traps and also cast for shrimp. The sale of the fresh shrimp and crab brings income I use to help my aging parents. In the California mode I also retrieve aluminum cans and other recyclables from Daufuskie Island and sell them on the mainland. The entrepreneurial spirit of my grandfather Jake and my father Willis make this all seem natural to me.

I am also working with other younger people who grew up on Daufuskie with me to establish an organization that will perpetuate our unique heritage and legacy as our beloved island is overcome by developers who bring luxurious resorts, golf courses, and attitudes that the native peoples do not exist or have a history.

My main income comes from my work on the mainland as a guidance counselor in several social service agencies. I understand so much of what the young people—particularly young men—are going through. I am reaching out to them every day, even though some of them think I am privileged and know very little about their lives. I have made some good connections and had some successes. I am humbled by the failures and those who are lost in the justice system.

Education has changed me as an individual, and now I am helping to change generations. I owe so much to my Daufuskie family—many of whom have passed on to their heavenly rewards. I owe so much to my professors and friends at Oakes College of the University of California at Santa Cruz. I entered the University as a Daufuskie Lad, and I left that academic community with a new vision of life and the future. Now I serve the community from which I came—I am giving back.

*The authors used pseudonyms for students mentioned in the article, and where appropriate all other individuals mentioned in the article have given permission for their names to be used.*

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